

B I B L I O T H È Q U E V E R T E

YOUNG INDIANA JONES AND THE SPECTRE OF VENICE

STORY & ORIGINAL FRENCH TEXT

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Young Indiana Jones and The Specter of Venice

(Indiana Jones Jr. et Le Spectre du Venise)

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Prologue

Venice, 1915

On this icy January night a wandering pedestrian near the Rialto Bridge would have been able to perceive a dull vibration coming from the depths of the canal. If our theoretical walker had leaned over the water they would have seen a beam of light, that of a small submarine powered by an electric battery engine. A machine straight out of a novel by H.G. Wells, author of *The Time Machine* and *The War of the Worlds*. The event would have been rare enough to make the headlines of the local newspaper the next morning.

But no one was strolling around the Rialto Bridge at this late hour of the night. Thus, Giovanni Casanova, the pilot of the submarine, was moving through these murky waters in complete tranquility. To his left and right, he saw a forest of pilings serving as the foundations for the buildings rising above the surface. The pilot felt as if he was flying between an army of immobile golem-atlases holding up the city for eternity.

The young man at the controls of the submarine was beginning to grow impatient. The impetuous Venetian still could not find what he had come to search for. He did not want to risk running out of power, which would inevitably happen if the batteries were drained of energy. Feverishly, he consulted the yellowed map for the third time, which was supposed to guide him through the maze of canals that crisscross Venice.

Unfortunately, it was a very old map, and some parts had been worn away by time. And as luck would have it, the exact spot where he found himself had been eaten away by the years. Cursing and fuming, the young man raised his head. It was then that he discovered a surprising sight in the beam of his spotlight.

Surely, this discovery alone was worth the detour: a diver was closely examining the foundations of a building. The man was connected to the shore by a tube that supplied his lungs with oxygen. As soon as the beam of light fell on him, he turned around as if stung by a needle. The next moment, he pulled on the tube twice to be brought back to the surface. Giovanni Casanova's eyes widened, sparkling green eyes: a submarine in a canal in Venice, one might accept that!

But a diver? What on earth could he possibly be searching for? Suddenly, the young man was overcome by dull anxiety. This unexpected presence, in this precise location, did not bode well.

Chapter 1

A Golden Ancestor

In a sumptuous Venetian palace, three people were having tea. On the walls the paintings by Italian masters attested to the wealth of the owners. The centerpiece among them was a canvas by Canaletto depicting Venice and the Grand Canal.

The sculpted and gilded furniture also testified to the fortune of the host, named Pietro Casanova, whose family had become famous worldwide through the romantic exploits of Giovanni Giacomo Girolamo Casanova de Seingalt, his ancestor.

Despite the absence of concrete genealogical evidence, Pietro enjoyed believing that he descended from this noble lineage. The original Giovanni Casanova had worked as a priest, secretary, soldier, violinist, magician, and even a spy. He had met many of the greatest figures during his travels across most of Europe's capitals. However, his greatest claim to fame was the fascination he had exerted on the most beautiful women of his time: according to legend, all had succumbed to his extraordinary power of seduction.

More than a century after the irresistible Giacomo's death, his memory still haunted the place like an invisible presence that imbued the walls of the house. His name had become synonymous with being a romantically desirable man around the world.

"Last night, as I was approaching the Rialto Bridge," Giovanni recounted, holding his tea cup between two fingers, "I saw a man dressed in a helmet-

ed diving suit examining the base of the bridge.

“But how could he breathe?” Norma Bellini wondered.

Norma, a singer by profession, already struggled with feelings of suffocation on stage, she could not imagine agreeing to spend time underwater! Giovanni waved away the question with a dismissive gesture.

“Oh, it’s very simple! He had an accomplice on the surface operating an air pump connected to the diver by a hose.”

“I see,” Norma conceded, somewhat vexed by the cavalier attitude of her friend Giuletta’s brother.

The two young women had met a few years earlier, before Norma’s departure for America. As soon as she learned that Norma was returning from the United States to begin a European tour, Giuletta had offered to host her while she gave a series of recitals at the Fenice, the famous opera house in Venice.

“But what could he have been looking for underwater?” Giuletta asked after taking a sip of hot tea. “And you, Giovanni? What were you looking for? And how did you manage to get a submarine?”

Giovanni gave her a broad smile, revealing a perfect set of teeth. A glint of malice crossed his green eyes, betraying a mix of enthusiasm and mockery.

“Misses, from the way you speak, you’d think I’m the mysterious figure in this story! Well, let me explain right away,” he said with just a little too much extra panache. “I don’t know what the diver was

looking for, but I suspect he had dishonest intentions. Otherwise, why would he be playing fish at past midnight? As for my submarine, I got it from the French inventor who built it. He agreed to lend it to me for a fee: that money will help him continue his research.”

The young man tilted his chin defiantly, as if asking his listeners, “So, are you satisfied?”

“You still haven’t told us what you were doing underwater in the Grand Canal after midnight,” Norma insisted.

“I was coming...” Giovanni began, before turning to his sister. “Well, I might have mentioned it to you, Giuletta, but... um... I made an astonishing discovery at the library: between the pages of an old manuscript, I found a map of a treasure. A map of Venice, dotted with mysterious indications that I managed to decipher. Unfortunately, the humidity has made some parts illegible.”

“A map... of... a treasure?” Giuletta gasped as she set down her cup. “Are you serious, Giovanni? Have you lost your mind? And here I thought you spent your days studying philosophy! When Dad hears about this...”

Her brother shook his head determinedly. “Don’t tell him now, I beg you! You know him: he’d be so worried for me that he’d forbid me to continue. And I wouldn’t want to disobey him: he’s always been so good to us since Mom died.”

“Yes, and you’d break his heart if you drowned while trapped in your so-called devilish contraption!” Giuletta retorted, her face flushed.

“Have you even thought about that?”

No, Giovanni had not considered the situation from that angle. Caught up in his enthusiasm, he might not have fully grasped the dangers he would face.

“Um... calm down, little sister. I swear I’m not taking any unnecessary risks. Besides, I have...”

“No unnecessary risks!” Giuletta interrupted. “Do you even know how many people like you have already died trapped in these metal shells? Probably dozens!”

“You’re probably right, Giuletta,” Giovanni conceded, lowering his eyes.

But the next moment, the familiar spark returned to his gaze. “However, think about the stakes of this venture. A magnificent treasure, and not just any treasure! Our ancestor Giovanni Giacomo Casanova’s treasure! Our family’s treasure!”

This time, Giuletta genuinely thought her brother had gone mad. Giacomo Casanova, again and again! This womanizer had amassed a treasure? And Giovanni had miraculously found its trace in the depths of a dusty manuscript?

“Our ancestor, or rather your ancestor, supposedly accumulated untold wealth and hid it... underwater?” the young girl asked skeptically.

“I’m not sure,” Giovanni admitted. “As I said, my map is illegible in some places. But I searched all over this part of the city above ground, without success. So, I concluded that the treasure must be underwater. It’s only logical.”

His expression darkened, and deep lines ap-

peared on his forehead. "But now, I don't know if I should continue or abandon my search. The most important thing right now is to solve the mystery of my encounter with that diver. Who is he? What does he want? I'd pay dearly to know the answers to these two questions."

"Not at the price of your life, I hope!" Norma interjected authoritatively.

"Oh, definitely not!" the young man replied with a wry smile. "Otherwise, I wouldn't have the pleasure of hearing you sing..."

This light jab earned Giovanni a furious frown from Norma.

"Anyway," he continued, "regardless of what you say, ladies, I am determined to investigate and uncover the diver's identity. It shouldn't be that hard to find a diver. They don't exactly crowd the canals!"

"And Mr. thinks he can do it alone!" Giuletta scoffed. "It's unbelievable! Come back to earth, little brother, or rather go back to it! By the way, I remind you that you have a very important exam at the end of the year..."

Deep down, Giovanni agreed with his sister. His studies should take priority over everything else. And besides, who knows? That mysterious diver might be a criminal? An assassin? Who was he working for? Who was paying him?

No, Giovanni did not feel equipped to face a gang of crooks on his own.

"On second thought, I wonder if I should give up this project."

The scent of victory brought a triumphant

smile to his younger sister's face. She underestimated her elder brother's determination.

“Of course, if I could find someone to help me. Someone with intellect, who can take a punch and problem solve...”

But he shook his head in frustration. If such a person existed, they certainly were not in Venice. No chance. Too big a divide between the cultured artsy citizens and the working class.

Chapter 2

The Stranger

Norma had perked up.

The entrance of his cleaning woman caught Giovanni in a side conversation. He was asking about the young men in her old neighborhood's Calcio Storico team being good students and seeking employment. The woman was from old Florence and they had the most storied version of this violent ball game.

Listening without appearing to be listening, Norma Bellini immediately had an idea.

So, without even considering that butting into the conversation showed she was clearly listening, Norma exclaimed, "I have the man you need!"

Giuletta let out a cry of dismay. "American Manners! So sorry," she half-protested half-apologized. But it was too late. Giovanni's ears had not missed this. He would demand to know who this was—who was going to help him.

"I'm listening, Norma," he said, without taking his eyes off his sister.

He had inherited from his father the intense habit of staring at others. Under his gaze, Giuletta became unable to resist. She fell under his spell, like a bird fascinated by a serpent. "Well, um... I'm not so sure now," Norma stammered.

Mercilessly, Giovanni turned to her and gave her the same look he had given his sister. The impetuous "Calabrian nightingale," as admirers from her native region had nicknamed her, immediately capit-

ulated. "Well... um... I wanted to talk about my friend Indiana Jones," Norma finally confessed. "I met him while I was going to Klondike about three years ago to visit my Indian family. Then we met again twice in New York."

The young woman lowered her eyes and whispered, "I haven't seen him in several months... But as I hoped, when he learned I was performing in Venice he didn't hesitate for a second in seeing me. He managed to convince his father to come here to study a medieval manuscript. They both arrived yesterday."

All blushing, Norma let slip this tender admission: "His embrace, his arms, it was as if we had parted just the day before..."

Overcome with emotion, Giuletta was dabbing her forehead with her embroidered handkerchief. This day was turning into a nightmare.

"How could your friend be of any help to me?" Giovanni asked, intrigued.

"Well, you see, he's sort of an adventurer and a detective."

"Good heavens!" Giovanni exclaimed.

"He threw gangsters into Niagara Falls," Norma calmly explained. "and was educated by an Oxford trained scholar. Most recently he made the first crossing of the Florida Strait by seaplane..."

"A unbelievable record!" Giovanni agreed. "I'm dying to meet him. When can I see him?"

Giuletta nudged her best friend. Hadn't she said enough? "Well, I have a meeting with him this afternoon. If you want I'll try to set up a meeting for



you.”

“Fantastic!” Giovanni exclaimed, jumping to his feet.

“Disaster!” Giuletta moaned, on the verge of fainting. But her brother wore his brightest smile. “I will be eternally grateful to you, Norma,” he declared emphatically, planting a kiss on the singer’s forehead. “Now, girls, if you’ll excuse me, I’m off to the library. I have work to catch up on!”

With that, he winked at his sister. “I don’t know what’s stopping me from wringing his neck!” Giuletta fumed. But after exchanging a knowing look with Norma, she couldn’t help but burst out laughing. Her brother was incorrigible. It was better to accept him as he was: a true representative of the Casanova family, and the worthy heir of his supposed ancestor.

“By God, Junior!” Professor Jones exclaimed, quite angrily. “How many times have I asked you not to leave your pajamas lying around in the bathroom, whether at home or at the hotel?”

Waving his arms, Henry Jones moved closer to his son. “And how many more times will I have to ask you before you hear me?”

With a belly full of a delicious lunch of pasta with tomato sauce, pasta with bacon, and a succulent pasta mix, Indy was a hundred miles away from thinking about his pajamas. Why couldn’t his father let him digest his food in peace? Life was so sweet

in Italy. He would take a nice nap, then join Norma in St. Mark's Square, the heart of Venice. They would stroll along the Grand Canal and then Indy would accompany the singer to her dressing room at La Fenice. In short, it would be an ideal afternoon, bathed in the gentle January sun.

Unfortunately, Professor Jones had other plans.

"Junior? You could at least have the courtesy to respond!" he bellowed, rolling his eyes.

The young boy took it upon himself to suppress his anger. How many times had he asked his father to stop calling him the ridiculous nickname "Junior"? And how many more times would he have to ask for this one small thing? Indy was convinced that his father took malicious pleasure in provoking him this way whenever he was displeased with his behavior. Certainly, Indy acknowledged some mitigating circumstances: the professor had changed a lot since the death of his beloved wife Anna, who had passed away three years earlier on March 3rd from a brutal bout with scarlet fever.

The man who had once been placid, who had always shown guilty indulgence towards his son's mischief, had turned into a grumpy, impatient, and sometimes mocking disciplinarian. Thus, the re-emergence of the nickname "Junior" dated back to Anna's death. Clearly, Henry Jones had resorted to this little tactic to assert his authority over his son, to drawn on a parenting authority he did not naturally possess.

Fearing that his only son might lose respect

for him, Professor Jones had become more controlling and strict. Sometimes he had trouble kept track of the rules he created, provoking resentment from the person he loved most in the world. Moreover, he overlooked an important point. While he had lost his beloved wife, his son had suddenly been deprived of his mother. This tragedy had been just as painful for the teenager.

Without a word, Indy strolled casually to the bathroom and picked up the offending pajamas. Professor Jones stroked his mustache to regain composure. In truth, he felt guilty for having scolded his son.

He had sworn to himself to be more patient and encouraging with him. But once again, he had let his irritable nature get the better of him. The truth was, the professor could not come to terms with the idea that his son, "Junior," was about to turn sixteen. Junior, sixteen! No, Henry Jones could not fathom it. Was it the passage of time that had gone too fast... or was it that the professor hadn't seen his only child grow up?

Soon, he would be facing an adult. An adult who had already lived enough to fill several ordinary lives. An adult who had traveled five continents, met the great figures of this world, flirted with death on several occasions, and accumulated more memories than his mind could contain. At fifteen, his son was an adventurer. At the dawn of a century that promised much for humanity, Junior seemed destined for an exceptional fate.

Who could say what the future held for him?

Would he become a geographer, historian, archaeologist, writer, inventor, politician, or diplomat? A spy?

All the professor hoped for was that he would find happiness, but never, ever, would he have the time to count his regrets. As for regrets, Henry Jones had accumulated more than his fair share. In his relentless pursuit of the relics of a distant past, he had forgotten to look forward—to the future.

More and more often, his son regarded him with a distant expression. And the professor began to wonder if he had failed in his duties as a father.

“There, I’ve put away my pajamas,” Indy declared in an intentionally neutral voice. “Now, if you don’t mind, I’m going to go see Norma.”

No, Professor Jones had no objections anymore, especially since he felt a bit guilty. “Have fun, Junior... um... Indy!” he said with a forced smile.

This time, he was sincere. He truly hoped that “Junior” would have a good time while he would go take refuge... in some obscure library.

To forget his regrets.

Chapter 3

An Angel Passes

“My word, Indy, you’re as white as the snow of Klondike!” exclaimed Norma Bellini upon seeing her best friend arrive at her bench in St Mark’s square. The young boy’s wool jacket sparkled under the winter sun as they sat, the bottom of his cream-colored pants was not yet splattered with mud. In her eyes Indy looked like an angel fallen from the sky. He just needed wings.

“How is your father?” she asked with a knowing smile.

It had been nearly three years since Norma had traveled the world, and thanks to diction lessons—essential for a singer—she was finally making progress. “He’s always the same,” Indy replied with a hint of annoyance. “Sometimes he ignores me for weeks on end, usually because he’s too busy trying to bury himself in books about the old world.”

With frustration, the young boy kicked a dried-up chestnut shell. “Some days, I can’t take a step without him finding fault with me.”

“His situation is hardly enviable,” Norma commented, shaking her head. “You have to think about it from his perspective. He married your mom with no intent of being a single parent.”

“Oh, I understand, don’t worry,” Indy assured her. “And I only want to be his friend. But I’m not sure he understands me...”

“Anyway, let’s talk about something else, shall we? Tell me, are you feeling up to tonight?”

Norma straightened up, walked over and began vocal exercises in the middle of the Square... to the apparent delight of the pigeons!

“Aaaaaaaah! Bello a me ritooooorna!
Aaaaaaaah! Bello a me ritooooorna!”

As if to salute this performance, the bells of St. Mark’s Basilica rang three times. In unison, Indy began to applaud. Immediately, Norma launched into another cascade of notes:

“Aaaaaahhh! I laugh to see myself so beautiful in this mirror!”

Indy could only agree: the young woman had a fiery gaze, an apricot complexion, raven-black hair, a wasp waist—in short, what many would guess was a Latin charm that he found impossible to resist!

Carried away by her momentum, Norma puffed out her chest, opened her mouth wide...

“Che più t’arrrrrreeesssttirir...”

But then came the E-flat that went awry, and Indy flinched. In just a few seconds, the nightingale’s apricot complexion turned bright red, then a purplish hue.

“Norma? What’s happening? Norma? Are you feeling unwell?”

All he received in response was a horrible groan. Petrified, the young boy stared at his friend with wide eyes. He didn’t dare shake her, fearing it would trigger an even more alarming reaction.

“Norma! Answer me, I beg you! Do you want me to go get a doctor?”

The singer clutched her throat, grimacing

horribly, then collapsed onto the cobblestones of St. Mark's Square, amidst the pigeons.

Frozen, Indy looked at his best friend's lifeless body for a few seconds, then knelt beside her. Miraculously, she was still breathing.

"A doctor! Get a doctor!" he screamed at the passersby who had gathered around.

A large man rushed over, clad in a big white apron. He carried a bucket filled to the brim with water. Without hesitation, he poured the contents over the young woman.

"Gahh!!" Norma screamed in a shrill voice. "What's wrong with you? Have you lost your mind, you...?"

Then she sat up and shook her brown hair. Her face had returned to its natural color.

"What the...?" stammered the man in the apron.

"Idiots!" Norma shot back, furious. "And you all, haven't you ever seen acting before? Don't just stand there staring at me stupidly. Disperse! There's nothing to see!"

The onlookers muttered a few unintelligible words about the unacceptable behavior of the youth in 1915. Back on her feet, Norma shot a sly smile at Indy.

"That was convincing, wasn't it?" she asked with evident satisfaction.

"Do you mean... that...?" Indy stuttered.

"I was rehearsing for my upcoming audition at La Scala in Milan. I'm auditioning for the role of Madame Butterfly in Puccini's opera, and I have to

perform the death scene in front of the director and the opera manager. Do you think I'll get the role? Do you think?"

For the moment, Indy remained stunned. Norma's performance was enough to convince even the most reluctant of spectators.

"Um... I think you shouldn't play with your... friends' feelings like that," Indy mumbled, all flustered. "You scared me a bit, I must admit."

Norma burst out laughing. "Really? You were worried about me! How sweet you are, Indy!"

And she hurried to plant a kiss on the young boy's forehead, short circuiting his brain enough he lost whatever he planned on saying.

"By the way, I almost forgot," she said. "My friend Giuletta's brother wants to meet you. He's determined to find the supposed treasure of his ancestor Casanova and..."

"You mean the Casanova?" interrupted Indy. "The legendary seducer to whom no woman could resist?"

"That's what Giovanni claims," Norma replied with her fluty voice, vigorously wringing the sleeves of her dress. "But Giuletta has doubts... Anyway, he wants you to help him identify a diver he saw under the Rialto Bridge from his submarine and..."

"His submarine!" Indy exclaimed. "This Giovanni has a submarine?"

With hands on her hips, Norma looked at Indy reproachfully. "If you would stop interrupting me, if you would let me explain, you wouldn't have to ask all these questions!"

With amusement, Indy noted that for the second time in a few minutes, Norma had regained her native accent due to her anger.

“I apologize, please continue...”

“He borrowed the vessel from a French inventor. In exchange for money that will allow him to continue his research. Anyway, he wants to meet you, and I promised to arrange a meeting between the two of you.”

“A meeting between you? Uh... between us? Well, that’s fine,” Indy replied, always ready for a new adventure. “And... the sooner, the better!”

Norma nodded and gave her friend a military salute. Then, after straightening her outfit and taming her damp hair, she signaled for him to follow her.

The two of them ran off into the Venetian maze.

Chapter 4

A Blank Cabbage

Two hours later, Indy returned to the hotel where Professor Jones was staying. Conincidentally just as the professor was coming back from the library where he had spent the afternoon bent over a yellowed manuscript.

“Dad, I have to tell you something! It’s unbelievable!” Indy announced with undisguised joy.

“Unbelievable, huh?” muttered the professor. “Well, I’m expecting the worst.”

Immediately, Indy’s face fell. Why did his father always have to douse his excitement with cold water?

“Alright, go ahead, Junior. I’m listening,” the professor said, his impatience showing. His research hadn’t progressed one bit since he’d arrived, and he was beginning to regret giving in to his son’s pleas. He would have been better off going to Paris or, better yet, returning to Utah.

“Norma introduced me to Giovanni Casanova, a descendant of the famous adventurer.”

“Casanova? Hmm... a rather disreputable character, Junior. I hope his heir places more value on morals. In this day and age that’s a virtue on the verge of extinction. But go on Junior, please.”

“To sum it up, this Giovanni has decided to find his ancestor’s treasure using a submarine.”

The professor’s glasses slipped to the end of his nose. An almost immediate realization set in. Junior was up to something again!

“Can you repeat that slowly, son?”

Clearly, the professor was on guard. He only called Indy “son” on rare occasions. When he needed to make amends or when he wanted to delay the explosion of his anger by a few minutes.

“Giovanni thinks his ancestor hid a treasure somewhere under Venice, near the Rialto Bridge,” Indy explained. “So he rented a submarine to try to find it, but guess what? He spotted a diver right where...”

Indy abruptly stopped. Indeed, his father was looking at him with a strange expression: eyes half-closed, nostrils flared, Professor Jones seemed to smell a trap.

“You said a diver, son? Dishwashers are smart enough just to put their hands in the water, even they know not to pull a bowl over their head and go under. And this diver is searching for Casanova’s treasure, who was traveling around Venice in a submarine? And I suppose you’re itching to be his pilot, is that it?”

Indy shrugged his shoulders. Another confrontation was brewing, and he wanted to avoid it.

“Uh... not quite, Dad. Anyway, I’m going diving with Giovanni tonight.”

“In his submarine?” the professor asked in a nasal voice, adjusting his glasses resolutely.

“Yes!” Indy replied confidently. “Please, Dad, make an effort to keep up!”

Henry Jones stared long and hard at his son before unleashing his anger.

“THAT’S OUT OF THE QUESTION,

JUNIOR!!” he thundered, with such force that the other guests in the hotel lobby turned, scandalized.

After catching his breath, the professor continued vehemently: “When will you stop playing with your life? I’m firmly opposed to you...”

But Indy wasn’t listening anymore. He had turned on his heels and was heading straight for the exit.

“JUNIOR!! I ORDER YOU TO COME BACK!”

The professor had to face the reality, just like the other hotel guests: fifteen was a difficult age to manage! His son only dreamed of asserting his independence, and a heavy-handed approach was no longer effective... He would have to change tactics if he wanted to maintain any authority over his offspring.

That evening, Giovanni presented his fabulous machine to the visitor from America.

“You’ve never seen anything like it, have you? Not even in the United States, I’m sure! Right?” he boasted with a wide smile.

“I have to admit, no,” Indy replied, whistling in admiration.

“Aren’t you afraid?” Giovanni asked, somewhat worried.

Indy shrugged. “If I were afraid, I’d never try anything new. My mother often quoted my grandfather: ‘When your time comes, you’ll be the first to know.’ I’ve made that my motto, so to speak. And so far, I’m doing just fine!”

“Well, then, let’s go!” Giovanni exclaimed as he slipped inside the submarine. He had carefully

hidden it between two closely spaced buildings, not far from his family home. The Rialto Bridge was only three hundred meters away, which minimized the risks of an accident. The craft operated at a depth of three meters, making any collision with a gondola or other vessel impossible. Moreover, at this late hour, few Venetians ventured out onto the water.

“Your turn now, Indy!” Giovanni said in a hushed voice.

Indy smoothly slipped into the cabin and marveled at the submarine’s controls.

“Do you have to recharge the batteries every day? What’s their range?” he asked curiously.

“After each outing,” Giovanni explained, “I have to go to where I’ve stored the generator. It’s a delicate operation that the man who lent me the submarine handles. When the batteries are full, I can navigate for two hours, at least in theory. To limit risks, I never stay submerged for more than an hour.”

“Wise precaution,” Indy approved.

Once he had settled in, Giovanni carefully closed the hatch and took his place at the controls, under Indy’s watchful eyes. “How many lessons did you take?” he asked.

“Three!” Giovanni announced proudly. “But I already knew a bit about navigation!”

After a few coughs, the engine started to purr with an encouraging regularity. “Let’s go!” Giovanni exclaimed, clearly excited by his new “toy.”

Aside from the engine noise, there was nothing but the sound of the waves lapping against the



metal hull of the craft. In this protective cocoon, immersed in the heart of Venice, Indy did not feel like part of the real world.

Would he have felt more comfortable if, like the diver the previous night, he had been connected to dry land by an umbilical cord: the oxygen tube?

Thanks to the submarine's spotlight, Giovanni was able to navigate with relative ease in the murky waters of the Serenissima. But this tranquility was only displayed in the depths. On the surface, the ripples of World War I were being felt: Italy had sided with the Allies against Germany, and some viewed this submission with a wary eye. The day before, Indy had read a scathing article on this topic in the local newspaper.

But for now, he was hardly concerned with the tremors of history in the making. He was focused on his current adventure: a treasure hunt of an unprecedented kind, even for Indiana Jones!

"I need to turn left, then right, then left again," Giovanni announced, expertly piloting the craft. "The key is to stay in the center of the canals to avoid hitting any pilings."

"The submarine wouldn't survive?" Indy inquired.

"Oh, it would," Giovanni replied with a wry smile. "But I wouldn't say the same for the pilings or the buildings they serve as foundations for..."

After about ten minutes, the submarine reached the Rialto Bridge. Giovanni positioned it to shine the spotlight on the exact spot where he had seen the mysterious diver the previous night.

“There! Look!” Giovanni exclaimed with pride.

“How could he know that a treasure was located here?” Indy asked.

“That, I don’t know. I didn’t mention it to anyone.”

“So it’s possible that the diver is actually searching for something else?” Indy suggested.

“It’s possible, indeed, but highly unlikely,” Giovanni estimated. “Venice really doesn’t hold anything interesting in its depths.”

“Who knows?” Indy concluded thoughtfully.

They waited for about thirty minutes, but to no avail. They had to face the facts: the diver from the night before had been cautious. Whatever his intentions, he had decided to postpone his underwater explorations...

“Let’s go back!” Giovanni suddenly declared after checking his watch. “I don’t want to take any risks; we need to get back to where the generator is.”

“Your wish is my command, Captain!” Indy replied.

Suppressing a yawn, he thought of Professor Jones, who must have been waiting for him in his hotel room. Surely, Indy would face a few reprimands upon his return. But the adventure was worth it.

It wasn’t every day that one got to roam Venice in a submarine!

Once the craft was stored and the generator activated, the two young men returned to their respective quarters. The guests at the Hotel Santa

Maria were fast asleep. Yes, all the guests.

Seeing the familiar nightcap in the bed next to his, Indy let out a sigh of relief. Quietly, he stripped off his clothes and slipped between the cold sheets.

Immobile under his blanket, Professor Jones felt relieved as well: “Junior” had returned safely from his nighttime expedition, and that was all that mattered. The next day, he would try to “make peace” with his son. And so be it if he had to concede!

Chapter 5

The Infernal Trio

The next morning Indy woke up around ten. The bells of Saint Mark's Basilica rang in the distance. Opening his eyes halfway, he noticed that his father had already deserted the place. The time for settling scores would therefore be postponed until the evening.

After downing a plate of spaghetti Bolognese for breakfast, Indy hurried to find Norma and Giovanni. During recital season, the young woman never got up before eleven o'clock to "rest her vocal cords," which were put to the test day after day. As for Giovanni, during submarine diving season he got up even later than usual, meaning around noon.

When they were all ready, the trio feasted on a delicious pizza, prepared using a recipe known only to Vittoria, the Casanova family cook: olives, anchovies, mozzarella, a hint of garlic, a handful of capers, and thin slices of prosciutto... the rest of the ingredients were a closely guarded secret.

"Delicious!" said Norma.

"Succulent!" added Giovanni.

"Divine!" concluded Indy, who had never tasted such a wonder in his native Utah.

The afternoon was spent devising increasingly crazy plans to track down the mysterious diver. Around three-thirty, Gloria reappeared with a tray filled with tea and small cookies... of her own making.

"You'll let me know what you think," she promised

the three food lovers. Each one forced themselves to taste at least one cookie, so as not to offend the cook.

“Savory!” commented Norma.

“And so light!” observed Giovanni.

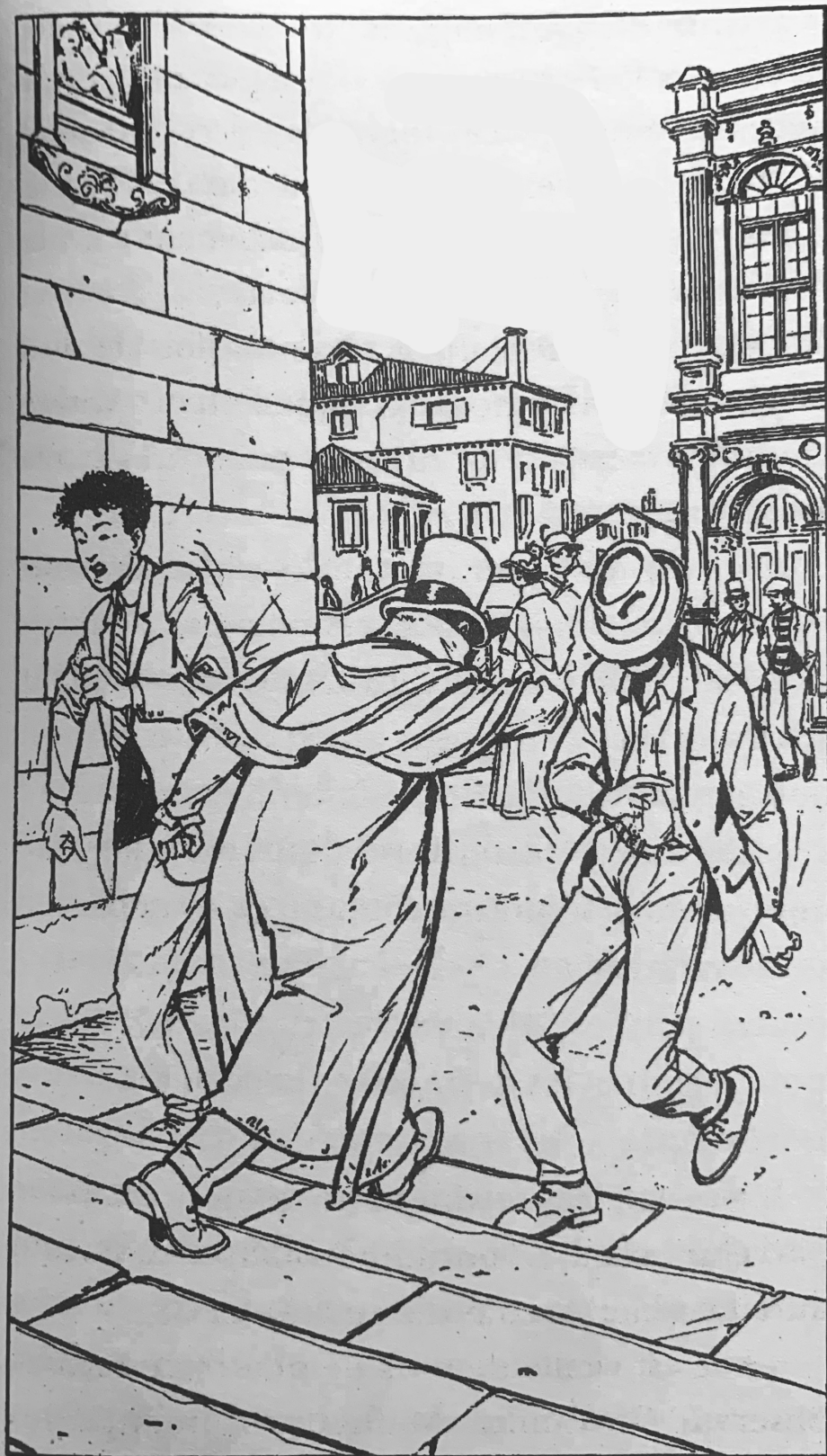
“We could eat these all day!” decided Indy, who could not have swallowed another crumb even if his life depended on it.

When the ancestral Casanova clock struck four in the afternoon—the very same one that reminded the illustrious Giacomo of his romantic appointments—Norma proposed they go to meet Professor Jones. Thus, the first contact between Indy and his father since their altercation the day before would take place “gently.” The latter would probably not dare to make a scene in the presence of the singer: he admired her voice too much!

“While we’re at it, I’ll get to know your father,” Giovanni chimed in with his usual nonchalance. “I’m curious to see what a medievalist looks like. I’ve never met one before.”

“You’re soon to be cured of any curiosity!” Indy joked. “I’ll remind you that he doesn’t think highly of you: he despises your ancestor, whom he considers immoral, and he hates you for dragging me into your submarine.”

“Bah!” Giovanni simply retorted. “If he’s into religion, he’s in the wrong city. There’s a new pope in Rome, a certain Benedict XV. Why doesn’t he go shake his hand? In the meantime, I’ll take the opportunity to show you the manuscript from which I drew the treasure map. It’s located right in the library



where your father works.”

“If only you could stop saying nonsense sometimes!” lamented Giuletta. “You express yourself like a ten-year-old. And I’m being generous...”

It was precisely this mixture of resourcefulness, cunning, and immaturity that made Giovanni Casanova so charming. Not to mention his green eyes and well-defined mouth.

“Let’s go!” Indy said, resigned to face his father’s bad mood once more.

It took them about twenty minutes to reach the old library, which was in dire need of restoration.

“It’s nearly four hundred years old,” Giovanni observed. “Unfortunately, municipal finances don’t allow for its maintenance as it should be. And then, that damned war...”

As they climbed the few steps that separated them from the library entrance, they were suddenly jostled by a man wearing a hat pulled down over his face. The rude man continued on his way without even offering them an apology or turning around.

“That’s a bit much!” exclaimed Norma, outraged by such impoliteness.

“Indeed!” Indy echoed, hands on his hips.

The incident might have seemed trivial. But as Indy pretended to pursue the stranger—just to show him what he was made of in Utah—the man ran off as fast as he could. That was enough to raise the young boy’s suspicions, and he took off after him, followed by Giovanni.

The stranger led them into a true maze of alleys, turning left, right, and then left again, until finally taking a left toward a narrow street where two young men were standing; the alleys were barely wide enough to let a man pass. Indy marred the perfect whiteness of his beautiful jacket by bumping into damp, dark walls repeatedly.

Suddenly, the fugitive darted into a dilapidated house. Indy and Giovanni followed him. A very unfortunate decision: as soon as they stepped inside, three of his accomplices captured them.

“Good job, gentlemen!” the man in the black hat congratulated them before turning to his pursuers. Giovanni was chattering his teeth. Indy clenched his fists.

“So, my little ragazzi? You’re looking for trouble? Well, that’s convenient, heh heh! Because I’m more than willing to create some for you, and much more than you think!”

With a theatrical gesture, he suddenly removed his hat, revealing... a Venetian mask that completely concealed his face.

“My word, it’s carnival!” Indy mocked, casting a fiery glance at his captor.

“Shut up!” Giovanni whispered. “This guy doesn’t look like he jokes around, if you ask me.”

The masked stranger chose to ignore the sarcasm. He had too much fun posing a few questions that harbored some very strange inquiries about the man they had met by chance at the library entrance where Giovanni and his two companions had decided to go just half an hour earlier.

How did the stranger know they would be there? Did he have a gift of ubiquity? Had he sent his henchmen to eavesdrop on the Casanovas' conversations? But for what purpose? All these questions swirled in Indy's mind.

"What were you doing underwater the night before last?" the stranger asked Giovanni.

Giovanni could hardly believe his ears. How could the man in the mask know?

"Come on, answer me, you little rascal! Why were you lurking around Rialto in a submarine?"

Indy elbowed him in the ribs. How long would Giovanni continue to hesitate? They had to say something, anything. Otherwise, the masked man would take great pleasure in creating "trouble" for them.

"If you refuse to answer," he threatened, "my friend Pier Paolo will make sure you do. He knows how to make you talk, heh heh! He knows a thing or two..."

Finally, a spark ignited in Giovanni's mind. He had just discovered the identity of this mysterious stranger. Of course, it could only be him!

"It was you, the diver?" he asked.

"Yes, it was me! So, surprised?"

Indy didn't wait for Giovanni to recover from his surprise before asking the question that needed to be asked.

"And may we know why you were exploring the Rialto area past midnight?" he said, brow furrowed, jaw clenched.

The masked man exchanged an amused glance

with his accomplices.

“Did you hear that, Pier Paolo? Ettore? Federico? Really, Americans never cease to amaze me: our young friend is ready for a career in Hollywood, don’t you think?”

The three henchmen nodded solemnly.

“Answer me!” Indy ordered, undeterred.

This time, the man in the Venetian mask erupted into a long, mocking laugh.

“Ha! Ha! He’s funny, really. What a good time I’m having with him. Ha, ha!” Then, in a quarter of a second, he completely changed his attitude. The laughter was replaced by a cavernous, menacing voice:

“Pier Paolo! Ettore! Federico! Tie up these two worthless ones and gag them.”

He then turned back to the captives, “Young people, I have a little surprise for you that you’ll tell me about... or perhaps not. Ha! Ha! I’m going to let you die of hunger and thirst, unless you die of cold first! Ha! Ha! Ha!”

The infernal trio worked with such efficiency that in an instant, Indy and Giovanni were rendered incapable of moving, speaking, or doing any harm to anyone! Without another word, the masked man and his accomplices left, slamming the door behind them.

“Mmmmm... Mmmmm...” Indy protested. As for Giovanni, he shed tears of rage. But no matter how much they struggled and tried to attract attention, nothing worked. They were doomed to perish in this icy hideout.

Chap 6

Confidence Reigns

Norma Bellini had waited for more than fifteen minutes for her friends to return on the steps of the library. Unable to wait any longer, she entered the building in search of Professor Jones; she needed to warn him of their disappearance.

"I knew this would end badly," muttered Henry Jones under his breath. "As always, Junior has done whatever he wanted. I had warned him..."

"The damage is done, Professor," interrupted Norma. "There's no point in lamenting. So, here's what I suggest: we need to contact the police."

"THE POLICE?" exclaimed Henry Jones.

"Shhh!!!" replied the other readers in unison.

"Come on, let's not stay here," murmured Norma.

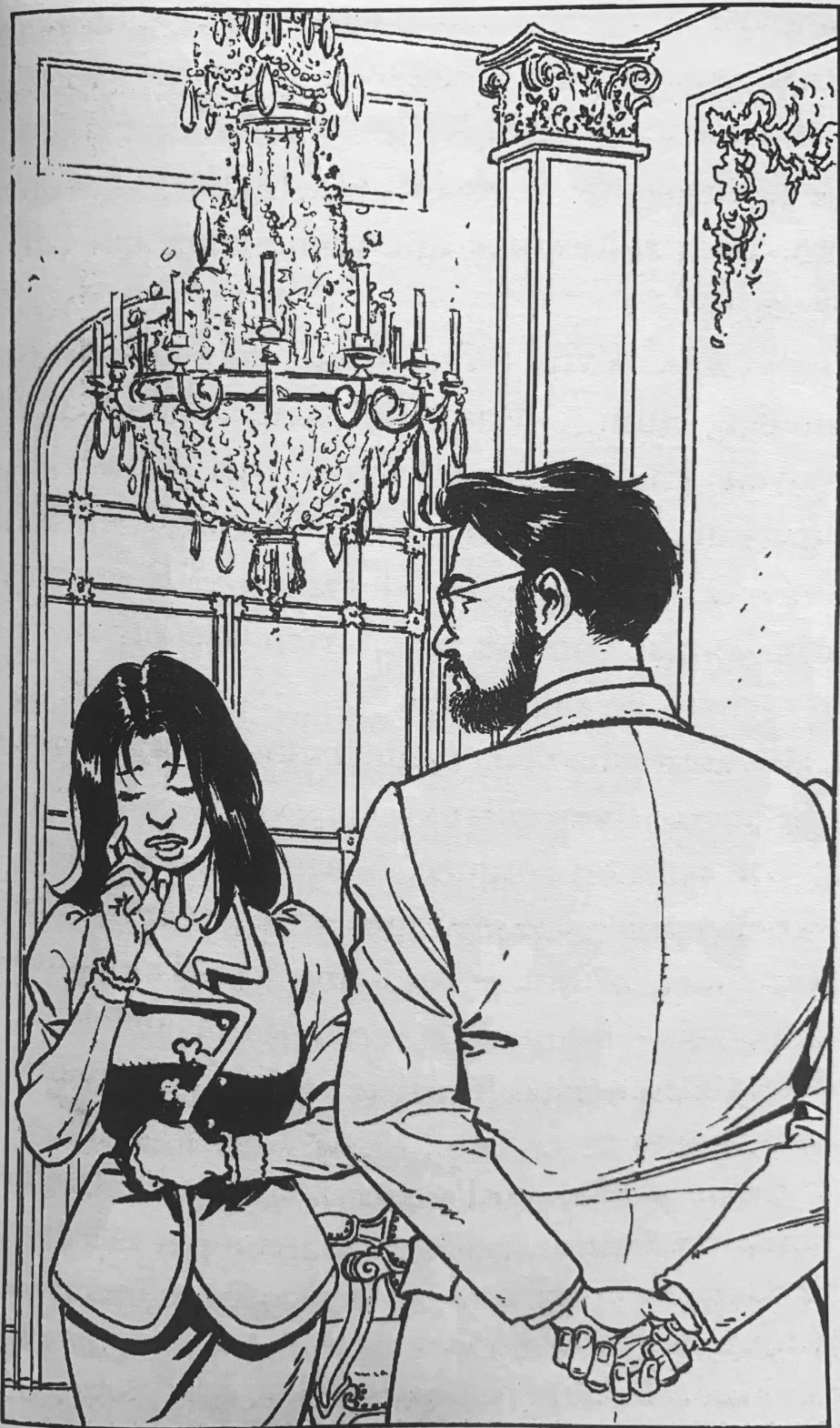
After casting a scathing look at the "silence police"—of which he himself had been a part just moments before—Professor Jones followed the young woman without protesting.

Once outside, he turned to Norma: "Isn't it a bit premature to contact the authorities?"

"This strange man in white doesn't inspire any confidence in me," the young woman explained. "My sixth sense tells me that Indy and Giovanni are in trouble." She looked up at the sky as if imploring some divine power.

"Big trouble, Professor Jones," she insisted, shaking her head.

Very early in his life, Henry Jones had learned



that a man could do nothing against a woman's intuition, that famous "sixth sense." He did not contest Norma's decision. However, he did propose the following deal:

"I agree. We'll go to the police. But first, to avoid embarrassing ourselves, I would like to make sure that the two boys haven't gone straight home. What do you say, Norma?"

"If you insist, Professor Jones... But I have no doubt: Indy and Giovanni are in trouble. Big trouble."

The professor refrained from adding any further comments. He quietly observed that the beautiful Norma could rival even the most hardened pessimist!

An hour later, Indy and Giovanni had not reappeared. So, without waiting any longer, Norma went to the nearest police station, accompanied by Giuletta and Professor Jones.

"A man with a face hidden under a hat? That's rather slim for a description," observed the on-duty policeman, a certain Corporal Barami.

He sported a magnificent handlebar mustache, quite striking on this man with a prominent nose. Norma searched the depths of her memory. Had she not noted some additional detail that would allow for the identification of the unknown man without a shadow of a doubt?

"He was wearing a white coat and was about

one meter seventy tall,” she announced.

While rubbing the bridge of his nose, the policeman gave a dubious pout. “Nothing else?”

“Focus, Norma,” insisted Giuletta.

The young woman thought and thought again, but she couldn’t remember anything else.

“In that case, ladies and gentleman, I fear we have very little chance of finding the suspect,” concluded Corporal Barami, leaning back in his chair.

“Does that mean you’re going to sit there with your hands tied while my son is dealing with a dangerous criminal?” inquired the professor.

His interlocutor threw his arms up in the air, signaling his helplessness.

“Well, I’ll complain to the consulate; count on me!” fumed Henry Jones.

If the professor had told him that the sky was falling on his head, the peacekeeper couldn’t have been more unperturbed. Clearly, the man rarely lost his cool.

“Wait!” intervened Norma. “It seems to me that... yes, that’s it: when he turned around to see if he was being followed, the unknown man’s face shone in the sunlight, as if he was wearing some kind of cream or varnish.”

The policeman began to groom his mustache with great care, like a true artist. Without a doubt, he must spend his days doing just that.

“His face shone in the sunlight, huh?” he asked, staring at the ceiling. Against all odds, his curiosity was suddenly piqued.

“As if this man was wearing some cream, a

varnish, or... a mask? Is that right?"

"A mask?!" exclaimed Norma. "You mean... like what the Venetians used to wear during carnival?"

Before responding, the policeman let a few seconds pass to build suspense.

"That's exactly what I mean, miss. And these days, men who walk around wearing masks in the middle of January are not common, I can assure you."

Then abandoning his mustache to point an accusatory finger at the young woman, he straightened up and declared:

"We will find him, I promise you! You can trust us."

In the grand house of the Casanovas, Norma paced the living room like a lion in a cage, pressing a embroidered handkerchief against her chest.

"No, really, it's impossible. I can't sing tonight. I'm too worried." And she concluded with a dramatic gesture.

"What has happened to them? Why hasn't the police given us any news? It's been an hour since we returned from the station!"

"Come on, calm down, Norma," Professor Jones urged. "We need to give them time to act. And if I were you, I wouldn't torture myself like this..."

Suddenly, the professor paused. With a careless gesture, he wiped his glasses, more to compose

himself than out of necessity.

“Um... to be honest... I’m quite worried myself. Um... But you know, Junior has often pulled such tricks on me in the past. He disappears for hours, even days, and then shows up smiling as if nothing happened. So now I’m armored against it.”

He approached the young woman and gave her a reassuring smile.

“I implore you, Norma, give your recital tonight: think of all those who bought their tickets and are excited to hear your beautiful voice! They would all be so disappointed. A true artist owes it to her audience above all else.”

“The professor is right, Norma,” Giuletta chimed in. “You aren’t going to sacrifice your career just because those two inconsiderate young men forgot to tell us their destination. Perhaps they even decided to go for a stroll in that cursed submarine and didn’t think it necessary to warn us.”

Norma wiped away an imaginary tear from the corner of her eye. Then she straightened up proudly.

“Let it be so. Like *Madame Butterfly*, I entrust my fate to you,” she announced with her innate sense of drama.

Inwardly, the professor couldn’t help but think: “I hope Indy doesn’t put her through the same fate as the American officer in Puccini’s opera...”

That evening, the great Norma Bellini would not disappoint her audience. She would go to the Fenice. She would sing the greatest arias of Italian opera. She would enchant the audience. That audi-

ence that adored her. Her audience.

“We’ll accompany you,” decided Giuletta.

“Right, Professor?”

“Absolutely. We will be there to watch over you, Norma,” he promised generously. “Now, go prepare. We have to leave, or you might be late.”

Chapter 7

Out of Breath

In her dressing room, Norma took a moment to regain her composure.

Before stepping on stage, she always performed the same ritual. Once dressed and made up, she would lie down for a few minutes and count the crosshatches on the wallpaper aloud. Most nights, by the time she reached one hundred and fifty, a deep sense of peace would wash over her.

But tonight, it took two hundred and fifty crosshatches for her heart to finally stop racing.

Never, in her darkest nightmares, had she imagined that Indy's disappearance would affect her so deeply.

"Signorina Bellini?" called Luigi, the stage manager. "Five minutes until you're on!"

Usually, when the stage manager called, she was ready. She'd descend the stairs to the wings and take a quick, discreet glance at the audience. Would they be attentive? Receptive? Restless? Enthusiastic? Each night, the crowd was different from the night before, and from the one that would come after.

But tonight, Norma didn't leave her dressing room right away. She lingered, trying to steady her nerves.

A knock came at the door again.

"I'm coming, Luigi! Just a second."

But apparently, Luigi had gone a bit hard of hearing, for the knocking came a third time, more insistent.

“I said I’m coming!” she called, her voice sharper this time.

When she opened the door, it wasn’t Luigi she found, but a street urchin, his face smeared with dirt and dressed in ragged clothes.

“Got somethin’ for ya, miss,” the boy said, thrusting an envelope into her hand. “A guy gave me this, said to bring it to ya and he’d give me a hundred lire.”

Norma recoiled slightly. Who could be sending her a message mere minutes before she was due on stage?

Indy! It had to be from Indy!

Elated, she dug into her purse and handed the boy an extra hundred lire. The boy’s eyes widened in disbelief. Two hundred lire! He’d never made that much money so fast in his life.

Hands trembling, Norma tore open the envelope. But the moment she read the message inside, the smile vanished from her face.

***“IF YOU WANT TO SEE YOUR FRIENDS ALIVE AGAIN, BE AT THE CAFÉ FLORIAN AT MIDNIGHT.”**

“Oh my God!” Norma gasped. “This is terrible!”

Her face, pale as death despite her makeup, grew even whiter as she staggered toward a chair. She read the message again, her breath catching in her throat.

“Signorina Bellini! It’s time!” Luigi called from the doorway. “What’s wrong? Are you not feeling well?”

“Yes... yes... I’ll be fine. It’ll pass... I’m coming down in a minute. Hold the orchestra, Luigi.”

“As you wish, signorina,” Luigi replied, accustomed to the whims and moods of divas. He retreated quietly on tiptoe.

Moments later, it was Giuletta’s turn to knock at the dressing room door.

“Come in, Giuletta,” Norma said, her eyes brimming with tears. “It’s a disaster!”

“What are you talking about?” Giuletta, the youngest of the Casanova sisters, asked. “Did you hear from Giovanni?”

Norma handed her the ominous note she had just received.

“By the Madonna!” Giuletta exclaimed. “They’ve been kidnapped! What can we do?”

Pressing her lips together, the young woman fell into deep thought. There was no use in panicking. Action was needed—and fast.

“Listen to me, Norma. I have an idea. Trust me. After the performance, go to Café Florian, just as they ask.”

Norma’s first instinct was to protest. The thought of it sent chills down her spine. But Giuletta placed a firm hand over her mouth.

“Don’t worry. You won’t be alone,” Giuletta continued. “I’ll alert my father. He’s returning from his trip today, and I’m sure Professor Jones will help too. Now focus on one thing: your recital. The audience is waiting for you. Don’t disappoint them. I’m counting on you, Norma.”

Giuletta paused before adding, “You’re my

best friend. Never forget that.”

As Norma prepared to step on stage, she made the sign of the cross—something she did before every performance. But tonight, the gesture held special significance.

When she finally appeared in her slightly revealing black gown, a hush fell over the crowd, followed by a thunderous round of applause.

She began her set with a piece by Verdi. As her voice soared through the aria, she could feel the tension drain from the room. The audience hung on her every note.

“Taceaaaaa la notte placaaaaaacidadaaa...”

When she finished, the crowd erupted in applause, a tidal wave of adoration. Norma bowed, her voice now fully warmed up. She gave the orchestra an imperceptible nod, and they seamlessly transitioned into *Alcina* by Handel.

“Mi restanoooooooo le lagritime...” Norma sang.

Suddenly, her heart clenched. She remembered singing this same aria in a cabin in the Klondike—with her beloved Indy by her side.

Indy, who had vanished without a trace.

Would she ever see him again? Alive and well?

This gnawing fear gave her voice a raw, haunting edge, moving the audience to tears. They rewarded her with a standing ovation.

With a lighter heart, Norma closed her recital with an excerpt from *La Cenerentola* by Rossini.

“Non più mestaaaaaa accanto al fuooooooooocoooo...”

And then, she saw him.

Sitting in the front row, directly in her line of sight. She couldn't tell if he was staring at her, nor could she read his expression. His face was hidden behind a white mask.

Struggling to maintain her composure, Norma continued her performance, silently praying she could make it to the end. But the masked stranger had other plans. As she raised her arms to unleash the full power of her voice, he made a crude gesture, drawing his finger across his throat.

Terrified, Norma hit a sour note, a shrill and jarring mistake.

“Non più mestaaaaa...”

A horrified murmur rippled through the audience. How could the great, the incomparable, the sublime Norma Bellini make such an unforgivable blunder? And more importantly, would she recover and finish her performance?

Those who doubted her didn't know Norma Bellini.

Her pride, fiery and Latin, always triumphed over fear. The Calabrian nightingale wasn't about to be cowed by some masked coward who didn't even have the decency to show his face.

Steeling herself for battle, she lifted her chin and, with an imperious gesture, signaled the orchestra to play the opening notes of her grand finale: *Casta diva* from *Norma*, by Vincenzo Bellini.

When she took her final bow, Norma basked in the glow of her well-earned triumph. But the real ordeal was still ahead, her midnight rendezvous at Café Florian.

Chapter 8

Sharpshooter

Right at midnight, she found herself at the place the man in the Venetian mask had indicated in his message. A diaphanous mist floated in the air, giving the place a sinister atmosphere.

No matter how hard Norma looked around, there wasn't a soul in sight. Yet, Giuletta had promised to meet at Café Florian with her father and Professor Jones.

So, how was it that...?

Suddenly, a terrible thought crossed her mind.

What if...?

No, she refused to consider the possibility of a second kidnapping. The man in the mask surely wouldn't abduct all of Indy and Giovanni's loved ones to extort confessions from them!

At this stage of her thoughts, Norma was convinced: the mysterious stranger had gotten wind of Giovanni's secret. He had been informed—how and by whom? Norma didn't know—about the existence of Casanova's treasure, and he had lured Indy and Giovanni into a trap.

The young woman shivered. She had now been waiting for five long minutes, and the cold chilled her to the bone.

Would someone finally show up?

She gave herself another five minutes. If no one arrived, she would return to the Casanova house.

Perhaps someone had received news from Indy and Giovanni?

Maybe they had both even returned to the venerable home?

What Norma didn't know was that Professor Jones, lurking in the shadows with Pietro Casanova, was observing the scene. Holding his breath to avoid giving away his presence, he was crimson!

"Professor Jones?" murmured Pietro Casanova, who was chattering his teeth, as much from fear as from the cold.

"Pppfff... yes?" said the professor, abruptly relaxing his abdominal muscles and exhaling a cloud of white smoke.

"Would you mind... terribly much... taking my revolver?" asked Pietro.

"But why?" the professor was astonished. "It's yours; it's up to you to handle it."

A long silence followed.

Henry Jones thought the matter was settled when he heard Pietro's voice again.

"Professor Jones?"

"Pppppffff... yes?" the latter was impatient.

"I... I'm too... scared to use it myself. I... I might kill someone by accident..."

"But I also don't know how to use a revolver!" exclaimed the professor. "And I too might shoot someone by mistake."

That's when he felt a cold metallic object being placed into his hand.

"I beg you, professor," pleaded Pietro, who looked pitiful in the darkness.

"Alright," Henry Jones conceded. "I'll do my best if the circumstances demand it."



Deep inside, he felt proud to be entrusted with such a responsibility. He wouldn't have admitted it for anything in the world, but he would have liked "Junior" to be there...

Suddenly, he raised an arm to silence his companion. A silhouette emerged in the mist. It must be him: the man in the mask.

This time, he was dressed in a strange white cape. In the darkness, he looked like a specter. He seemed to float, weightless, on the mist's swirls.

From his observation post, the professor saw him approach Norma, standing as straight as an "I". He couldn't help but admire the young woman, who bravely faced such a dangerous enemy. She exchanged a few words with the stranger.

"What do you think we should do now?" asked the professor to Pietro Casanova. "Should we intervene or stay in the shadows?"

His question went unanswered.

"Wake up, Pietro!" ordered the professor in a whisper. "This is no time to sleep! I asked for your opinion on the course of action."

Still nothing.

This time, it was too much! Professor Jones stretched his arm backward to elbow the sleeper... but met no resistance.

He immediately turned around, only to find... that his companion had vanished. As if by magic.

"Bah! The coward must have fled," thought the professor.

But the next moment, he realized the full gravity of the situation. He was now alone to face a

kidnapper and help Norma if this man resorted to violence against the young woman.

Trembling, Henry Jones looked at his weapon, which gleamed in the night.

Suddenly, Norma let out a cry of terror. The masked man had grabbed her.

The blade of his dagger glinted at the singer's throat.

"And now, Professor Jones," said the masked man, "come out of your hiding place. I know you're there."

"Pppffffff..." he heard a few meters away. For a second, the professor considered going all out and aiming at his assailant.

He cocked the gun, aimed, and... didn't fire, afraid of hitting Norma.

"Come on, come out, professor. I'm waiting for you. The girl too. She is between life and death, you know?"

Fuming, the professor emerged from his hiding place, protesting against these barbaric methods:

"You behave like those barely civilized medieval tribes who only knew the law of arms! You are not worthy of living in the 20th century!"

"I agree, Professor Jones. But you see, the law of arms is also knowing how to use them properly," said the man, tightening his grip as if to suffocate Norma.

"Unfortunately for you and the young lady, you hesitated, professor. So, don't lecture me on manners:

just know how to die gracefully! Ha! Ha!”

Suddenly, he called out into the night:

“Pier Paolo, come disarm our friend Professor Jones, please.”

A hunched figure appeared in the doorway—that of Pietro Casanova, arms tied behind his back—soon followed by a second: Pier Paolo, wearing a predatory smile.

“When one doesn’t have the guts to use a weapon, Professor Jones, it’s better to leave it to true professionals,” the masked Italian said, letting out a sarcastic laugh.

Then, in a sharp voice, he ordered:

“You heard, professor? Give him your weapon, or your young friend will lose her will to sing forever...”

Dancing from one foot to the other, Henry Jones hesitated one last time.

Wouldn’t it be better to go for broke?

He just needed to aim carefully and... his interlocutor wouldn’t have time to carry out his threat.

“Professor, I’ll count to three. If you don’t hand your weapon to Pier Paolo, I’ll slit the girl’s throat! One... two...”

The professor raised his arm and... closed his eyes. He was about to pull the trigger when a scream tore through the night’s silence:

“No, professor, no!”

It was Norma’s voice, terrified to see him pointing his weapon straight at her!

Chapter 9

Interrogation

“... Three!” announced the masked Italian.

As if emerging from a trance, Professor Jones reopened his eyes and stared, mouth agape, at his own hand, which was holding a revolver pointed at Norma.

At Norma?

Horried, he dropped the weapon, which clattered on the cobblestones with a metallic crash.

As soon as Pier Paolo seized the revolver, his boss released Norma.

“Well,” he announced, spreading his white cape. “I see you’ve regained your senses, Professor Jones. Now, my friends, you will walk in single file and follow me.” Adding on his exit, “I do not recommend trying to lose me. Pier Paolo has excellent vision, even at night, and he never misses a target, even if it’s moving. Light the lamp, Pier Paolo, and give it to me. I’ll lead the way.”

As if struck mute, the three captives started walking towards an unknown destination, guided by the flickering light of an oil lamp.

They walked about four hundred meters through a labyrinth made even more tortuous by the thickening mist. Each of their steps echoed in the muffled silence. Pier Paolo would have no trouble locating them if they tried to escape.

After a long trek, the “specter” of Venice stopped in front of a heavy carved wooden door. He slid an immense key into the lock.

The next moment, Norma, Henry Jones, and Pietro Casanova were unceremoniously thrown into a damp and icy cell.

Inside, they found their unfortunate companions: Indy and Giovanni, shivering from the cold after more than eight hours without food or a hot drink.

"It's all my fault," lamented Pietro Casanova. "I am but a coward. If I had used my revolver, we wouldn't be here."

"I could say the same," commented Henry Jones. "But I believe we made a wise decision, you and I."

"I completely agree with you!" Norma chimed in. "I'd rather end up in this cell than in the cemetery..."

"Except that this cell itself might turn into a cemetery," observed the professor.

"Shut up!" ordered the masked Italian. "Where do you think you are? At a social gathering? In the latest salon where people chat? You're just a bunch of chickens, spending your days clucking! All the better, it makes my job easier: for I feel no pity for you."

He turned around, swirling his white cape.

"Pier Paolo! Tie up these chatterboxes and gag them, so I don't hear them anymore."

"At your orders, boss."

Then the "chief" joyfully contemplated his five prisoners by the light of his oil lamp.

"Now, it's time to go to bed," he simpered. "I wish you sweet dreams. But above all, don't catch

cold! Ha! Ha! Ha!”

Laughing and spitting, he waited until Pier Paolo finished his sinister task, then decisively left the premises.

Unable to exchange a single word, or even see each other in the darkened cell, the five prisoners had no choice but to endure their suffering in silence.

Until their torturer returned to free them—which seemed unlikely.

Or until death followed...

Deafened by the combined snores of Pietro and Professor Jones, Indy hadn't slept a wink when the first rays of the sun filtered through the cracks in the thick walls of their cell. These were actually old air vents that probably opened onto an inner courtyard. They had been hastily sealed in recent times, as evidenced by the stone fragments scattered on the ground there.

“Mmmmm... mmmmm...” he groaned at his companions.

Norma turned to him, eyes wide open.

She had covered herself with a warm coat before leaving La Fenice, and the masked Italian hadn't thought to take it from her. The young woman hadn't suffered too much from the cold. As for Professor Jones and Pietro Casanova, they had also received preferential treatment, since they had been able to keep their jacket and frock coat, respectively.

But it was not the same for Indy and Giovanni: the previous day, they had gone out in light jackets, given the mild afternoon temperature. At this

point, they were “paying the price.”

Frozen, shivering all over, they could no longer feel the extremities of their numb limbs.

The man in the Venetian mask must have been a light sleeper, as it was less than ten minutes before he opened the iron door of the cell.

“So, did you sleep well, my little chickens?” he taunted. “I’m sure you must be hungry? No? Well, that’s good, because I didn’t bring you anything to eat. Ha! Ha! Ha!”

Indy and Norma guessed that he was smiling under his mask.

“But look at the professor and Mr. Casanova senior. My word, they’re having a good time here...”

And with those words, he gave each of them a violent kick in the shins. Norma couldn’t hold back a cry under her gag.

As for the victims, they groaned in pain.

“You probably think you’re on vacation, gentlemen?” the masked man taunted. “Well, I have news for you: today’s schedule is a bit special. In the first part of the day, I’ve planned a... rigorous interrogation. Then, after you skip lunch... and if you’re still up for it, I’ll perform an amusing experiment on you. But shh! It’s a secret... Ha! Ha! Ha!”

He then turned to Pier Paolo, who seemed to be gloating, and signaled him to help Professor Jones to his feet. “Mr. Jones, I need your services... oh, pardon me: your services! Ha! Ha! Ha! Pier Paolo, take him to the interrogation room!”

The professor’s unsteady gait spoke volumes about his state of fatigue. He might have slept a few

hours, but the cold and immobility, combined with the lack of food and drink since the day before, had drained his strength.

“MMMM... MMMMMM...” protested Indy, furious.

“Don’t worry, my boy,” said the masked man. “If you behave well, your turn will come too! Ha! Ha! Ha!”

And the heavy door closed again on the unfortunate captives.

Chap 10

Let the Celebration Begin!

The professor was forcibly taken to another room, just as uninviting. The walls were damp, and the only source of light was a kerosene lamp. In the middle of the dirt floor stood a chair.

“Please have a seat, professor,” the man said.

Then he turned to his factotum.

“Pier Paolo, put on your gloves, please...”

Henry Jones’s eyes bulged with fear, and he began to tremble all over. He was no less courageous than the average university professor, but no more so either. The prospect of being handed over, bound hand and foot, to the aforementioned Pier Paolo would have terrified anyone.

“As I was saying, professor, I have a few little questions to ask you. If you cooperate, I’ll be done quickly. If not...”

“Mmmmm... Mmmmmm... Mmmmmm!”

Henry Jones mumbled, wriggling in his chair.

A diabolical smile spread across the masked man’s face.

“What? Already? Are you ready to talk? Dear professor, you’re spoiling my fun. But never mind. I am benevolent. So, I will listen to you.”

“Mmmmm... Mmmmmm... Mmmmn...”

“Pier Paolo? Remove the professor’s gag, please.”

As soon as he was able to speak, Henry Jones began to assert his rights. Again, he invoked the American consulate, then threatened to inform the

Italian government of his captor's actions. But none of these reasonable arguments seemed to affect the masked man in the least.

"If I achieve my goals, Professor Jones, there will be no more Italian government in a few days. In the meantime, I'd like you to help me locate the famous treasure of Giacomo Casanova. You see? The one that young Giovanni is diligently searching for near the Rialto Bridge."

"I have no idea!" the professor defended himself. "How do you expect me to know where it is?"

His interlocutor took three steps back before turning to his accomplice.

"Pier Paolo, I believe our American friend hasn't quite understood what I meant. Could you explain it to him... in more detail?"

Pier Paolo bared his teeth, like a rabid dog ready to bite. Then, with his black-gloved hand, he grabbed the kerosene lamp and approached the professor, who was petrified with fear.

"I swear I don't know anything. Nothing at all!" Henry Jones assured.

Despite the freezing cold in the room, beads of sweat appeared on his forehead.

"What do you want to do to me? Are you mad? If I knew something, I would tell you!"

"Then why did you come to Venice, Mr. Jones?" persisted the masked man. "WHY?"

"It's very simple," the professor replied, relieved to see that Pier Paolo had stopped a meter away from him. "My son is a friend of Norma Bellini. He wanted to hear her sing at La Fenice and

convinced me to accompany him. I agreed because I wanted to study an old manuscript that happens to be in Venice.”

“I don’t believe a word of it!” the Italian barked. “You’re lying!”

The professor shook his head vigorously.

“No, I’m not lying!” he protested. “What do you want me to tell you? Do you want me to make up a hiding place for this so-called treasure? You’ll go there and find nothing, that’s all. What a waste of time!”

Despite the impeccable logic of this response, the masked man began to stamp his feet in anger. Furious, he raised his left arm and struck the professor so hard on the head that he lost consciousness.

“Pier Paolo! Put this one on ice and fetch me Father Casanova! He’ll talk! He’s even more cowardly than this miserable Jones!”

“More cowardly?”

“Yes, more cowardly! Imbecile! That means he’s even less brave!”

“Oh, I understand,” replied Pier Paolo, proud to have enriched his vocabulary with a new word.

He picked up Professor Jones and dragged him to the next cell, humming: “He is the most cowardly, for it no longer rains... and he can take no more! Ha! Ha!”

A few minutes later, he returned with Pietro Casanova, as pale as a sheet.

“Please, have a seat, dear sir,” the masked man began. “I warn you right away that I am out of patience. So, don’t try to outsmart me.”

“Oh n... n... no..., there’s n... n... no danger...”
stammered Giovanni’s father.

“You’re right: there’s no danger for you... if you answer my questions nicely. Here’s the first one. It will also be the last: where is the treasure?”

“T... the t... tr... treasure?! Wh... what tr... treasure?”

Pier Paolo began to shake his head. His master was right: Pietro was more cowardly, but just as foolish as Professor Jones. Why, oh why, did the prisoners insist on not answering the questions they were asked?

“I won’t ask you a second time!” the masked man spat. “If you don’t talk, I’ll have to take action!”

It was then that Pietro Casanova had an unexpected reaction. Terrorized by his interlocutor and by Pier Paolo, who was gently shaking his kerosene lamp, Giovanni’s father fainted in fear and collapsed to the ground. His head hit the floor with a dull thud.

“What? This isn’t possible! Pier Paolo, tell me I’m dreaming! Pinch me to prove I’m awake!”

Immediately, the faithful servant approached his gloved hand to his master’s arm.

“No! Triple idiot! It’s just a figure of speech, nothing more, a manner of speaking!”

Disheartened, Pier Paolo immediately sulked.

“Well, I hope our young friends will be more talkative. Let’s go get them!”

A few minutes later, Indy, Norma, and Giovanni saw the door to their hell open once again. Pier Paolo dragged the limp bodies of Professor

Jones and Pietro Casanova as if they were mere sacks of potatoes.

Seeing them unconscious, Indy and Giovanni each believed their father to be dead.

“MMMMMMMM...! MMMMMMMM!” they protested in unison.

The masked Italian approached Indy and tore off his gag.

“Now, your turn, boy...”

“You miserable assassin! You’re a monster! Why did you kill him? He would never have harmed a fly! I’ll avenge him, mark my words!”

At that moment, Federico burst into the cell.

“Boss! Come, I need to show you something.”

With a look of disgust, the masked Italian shoved the gag back into his young prisoner’s mouth.

“You won’t get away with this! Now, if you’ll excuse me, I have work to do...”

He turned, sneering, to Federico and declared solemnly:

“The second phase of Operation Venice can begin. Ha! Ha! Ha! So, the bomb is ready, Federico?”

“Almost, boss. I just need to check the fuse.”

“Perfect. Yes, perfect. In a few hours, the country will be in flames, the government will resign, and I will take control of the world! A new era will begin, shining across the globe.”

Mouth agape, Indy drew the only possible conclusion: he was dealing with a madman. A raving madman.

Chap 11

The Great Escape

As soon as the jailers closed the cell door, Indy began to remove his gag. In his haste, the masked Italian hadn't pushed it in as deeply as Pier Paolo, and Indy managed to get it off in less than two minutes.

Immediately, the young boy turned to Norma, tears in his eyes.

"I'll get those bastards, I swear!" he promised, holding back his tears. "But first, I have to get us out of here."

"Mmmmm...! Mmmmmmm!" agreed Norma and Giovanni in unison.

That was well said! But how was he going to fulfill his promise?

"My father always kept a small knife in the pocket of his jacket," Indy explained. "He used it to tighten the screws on his glasses. If Giovanni and I push him with our feet to the pillar where you're tied, Norma, you should be able to slip a hand into his jacket."

"Mmmm..." Norma replied, nodding.

Indy then turned to Giovanni, who could barely hide his emotion at the sight of his father's motionless body.

"Are you ready, old friend? I know the shock is hard, but we have no choice. We absolutely have to get out of here to escape these criminals. Otherwise, God knows what fate they have in store for us!"

Without further ado, the two young men lay

down on the ground, legs bent, knees pointed toward the ceiling, and began to push Professor Jones toward Norma. They had to stretch their legs to the maximum to succeed.

That's when Norma went into action. She slid her right arm through the bonds that bound her wrists until she touched the professor's jacket with her fingertips.

"You're almost there, Norma," Indy commented. "A little more to the left... yes, like that... no, not so much... there! You just need to slip your fingers inside the pocket!"

"Mmmm... mmmmm...!" protested Norma. It wasn't that easy! Why didn't he try himself? The ropes cut into her flesh, and her fingers weren't long enough to grab the knife. She could feel the metallic object but had no grip.

"Try lying down, Norma," Indy suggested. "Your wrists might pass more easily through the bonds."

"Mmmmm! Mmmmmmm!"

The young woman wiggled on the ground and managed to slide her wrists two centimeters further through the noose.

"There you go, you've got it!" Indy triumphed. "Norma, you're the most amazing girl I know!"

"Mmmm..."

With the knife, Norma managed to cut her bonds and free the others, starting with Indy, who rushed to his father to do the same and remove his gag.

These odious objects had no place anymore.

“Dad! Dad! I’m going to miss you so much!”

Indy lamented, inconsolable.

It was then that Professor Jones opened one eye.

“Not so fast, Junior!” he growled. “I’m not dead yet!”

“Dad!” Indy rejoiced. “You’re alive?”

“Of course, I’m alive, Junior. Why the question?”

“Because I thought the Italian and his torturer had killed you!”

The professor sat up.

What new obsession did his son have?

“An Italian and his torturer? Killed? Really, I don’t get it. But one thing’s for sure: your sense of humor hasn’t improved! I don’t find this funny at all! Not at all!”

And as if his father wasn’t angry enough, Indy burst out laughing in his face.

“Dad, I love you! I’m so happy you’re alive!”

Furious, Henry Jones turned to Norma.

“Could you explain what these antics are about?”

The young woman looked at the professor with astonishment. She tilted her head slightly to the side: “You mean you don’t remember undergoing an interrogation a few minutes ago?”

“An interrogation? But what are you talking about? And to begin with, what are we doing here, in the basement of the house?”

“In the basement of the house?” Norma re-

peated.

Amazed by Indy's father's words, she called on the young boy to untangle the threads of this misunderstanding. At that moment, Giovanni's father also emerged from his coma.

"Huh... what... how...? No, I swear, I don't know where..."

"Dad, you're alive!" Giovanni exclaimed in turn.

"He's at it too!" grumbled Professor Jones. "You've all lost your minds!"

"What happened to me?" Pietro asked, placing a trembling hand on his bruised forehead.

"These criminals brutally attacked you," Giovanni replied, overjoyed to see his father "resurrected" before his eyes. "But you're still alive; it's a miracle!"

"A miracle? But I don't understand: I was having a glass of port with my friend, Professor Jones, when..."

It soon became clear: Pietro Casanova and Professor Jones suffered from temporary amnesia. They had lost their memory! Unable to remember the events of the previous day, they still imagined themselves in the Casanova house, chatting over a glass of port.

The worst part was that they wouldn't listen to reason: they flatly refused to believe a word of what the three young people were telling them.

"There's nothing to be done," Indy concluded sadly. "For now, the best thing to do is find a way to open this door."

“Just use the key, Junior; it will be simpler,” Henry Jones advised.

“Unfortunately, Dad, our jailers didn’t leave it for us...”

“Our jailers! More of this nonsense!” his father protested.

Under the circumstances, the expression was quite fitting: Henry Jones couldn’t have put it better himself!

“I know what we need!” Norma intervened. She knelt down and picked up a metal rod she had spotted not far from where Giovanni had been tied.

“And what do you plan to do with that instrument?” Professor Jones, whose irritable nature was reemerging, questioned.

“It’s simple: I’m going to pick the lock.”

In less time than it takes to say, the young woman proved she had the skill of a professional burglar.

“Well done, Normal!” Indy congratulated. “I’ve probably told you this before, but you’re the most extraordinary girl I know!”

“Well, you must not know many!” Norma replied modestly.

A few seconds later, the five captives were on the run. Pietro quickly got his bearings. “Turn left! We’ll be home soon!”

And he dashed off without hesitation... in the wrong direction. As he ran, Indy pondered: who was this mysterious masked Italian? What were his intentions? And what was this mysterious “Operation Venice”?

He was at this stage of his thoughts when a huge explosion was heard about five hundred meters behind the small group.

“Junior, you didn’t tell me it was the Fourth of July, Independence Day in the United States?”

“You’re mistaken, dear friend,” Pietro Casanova corrected. “It’s the beginning of the famous Venice Carnival.”

Indy, Giovanni, and Norma exchanged a knowing look. The two “wise” men of the group had indeed lost their minds. It was the middle of January, and the carnival hadn’t been celebrated in Venice for a long time.

Chap 12

A Spectre in Smoke

“Let’s see what happened,” Indy suggested.

“Is it really necessary?” Norma asked, fearing they might come face-to-face with the masked Italian or one of his henchmen again.

“It’s essential,” Indy declared, adding in a somber tone, “I have the feeling that Federico’s fuse worked beyond all expectations...”

Everyone turned back, hoping to learn more. A thick, black cloud of smoke was rising from the alley where they had been held. In the still-sleepy Venice, the blast was a loud, jarring shock.

Indeed, the blast had completely destroyed the house they had just left.

“Fortunately, we had the good idea to escape,” Giovanni observed, dazed.

“Thanks to whom?” Norma pointed out, frowning.

“I owe you a debt, and I will never forget it,” Giovanni replied solemnly.

Only Indy went inside, with a handkerchief pressed against his face. He passed by the door of the first room—the cell where the five captives had spent the night—and then the one where Professor Jones and Pietro Casanova had been interrogated.

Finally, he reached what seemed to be a workshop: Federico lay lifeless amid a heap of debris. Despite searching thoroughly, Indy found no trace of the masked Italian. However, he didn’t leave empty-handed: under the rubble, Indy found Pietro’s

revolver. It would undoubtedly prove very useful in the hours to come.

With his eyes red from smoke, he climbed over the debris and returned to the street. Already, a crowd was gathering near the explosion site, and the police would soon arrive. Indy didn't want to be seen in the area. It was best to get away as quickly as possible.

"Leave now?" Professor Jones objected. "Just when we were starting to have some fun? It's not fair. No, it's not fair!"

But Indy wasn't listening. Troubling thoughts assailed him. What if the masked Italian was actually a terrorist? In the midst of a world war, Europe was a veritable powder keg. It didn't need a madman to ignite it further.

"Giovanni," Indy whispered to his new friend, "I absolutely want to know what this lunatic was doing near the Rialto Bridge. We need to go back there tonight. I suggest you inspect the depths of the canal from your submarine while I keep watch on land."

"Alright," Giovanni replied. "You can count on me. Let's meet around ten o'clock at the usual place."

"I'll be there without fail," Indy responded.

Professor Jones, beginning to find the wait long, then cheerfully asked, "So, when's the fireworks show? I wouldn't want to be late."

"And the flower parade, what's its route this year?" Pietro Casanova added.

That evening, Norma went to La Fenice as

usual for her recital. Since Indy and Giovanni were to go out, it had been arranged that Professor Jones and Pietro Casanova would attend the performance with Giuletta. This way, they would be under close watch!

Indeed, everyone feared that their temporary amnesia might lead them into embarrassing situations from which they would have great difficulty extricating themselves...

When the bells of St. Mark's Basilica struck ten, Giovanni's submarine set out toward the Rialto Bridge. The trip would take just a few minutes.

Meanwhile, Indy kept watch on the quay, equipped with a torch in case of any eventuality. The moon was shining brightly, but Indy took his precautions whenever possible. He had decided to position himself about twenty meters from the bridge. Hidden near a door, he was unlikely to be surprised and had a clear view of the surroundings.

The young boy gazed at the moon, his thoughts wandering. It was about four in the afternoon in the United States, and the sun was already setting. Some residents of Utah, his latest home state, were probably busy looking at the same moon, thousands of miles away.

His friend Herman Mueller, who had accompanied him on several of his world travels, was likely attacking his first triple-decker sandwich of the evening: two slices of mortadella, a leaf of lettuce, two slices of roast beef, another leaf of lettuce, two slices of cheese, a tomato, all precariously held between the two halves of a small round roll.



Indy thought about all the good times shared with Herman since moving to Utah. He also thought of Miss Seymour, his English governess, who had passed away prematurely, just like the young boy's mother, Anna Jones...

But suddenly, Indy's attention was caught by a mysterious noise: a clinking, followed by a "splash!" The diver was back in action!

On the bank, a man dressed in black was operating an oxygen pump. Probably the one named Pier Paolo.

Indy was torn: should he prioritize his own safety or take some risks to try to pinpoint the diver's location?

True to form, the young boy followed his courage. Quietly, on tiptoe, he moved slowly toward the canal, careful not to slip on the wet cobblestones.

Under the water, Giovanni approached the Rialto Bridge. He directed his spotlight toward one of the bridge's supports, then the other.

That's when he found what he had come for: a diver working between two of the bridge's pilings.

As before, as soon as the beam of light fell on him, the diver turned around and pulled on the hose supplying the oxygen. Once it had disappeared, Giovanni made a courageous but risky decision: to inspect the area.

With great skill, he positioned the submarine a meter away from the suspicious pilings.

What he saw then made him cry out in horror: two bombs, each carefully attached to a piling. Enough to blow up not only the bridge, a treasure of Venetian architecture, but also damage the surrounding buildings.

He had to warn Indy immediately.

But how?

On the surface, Indy didn't know what to do: the diver had just been brought up by his accomplice, who was reporting on his underwater exploits. Indy managed to catch a few snippets of conversation but not enough to understand what was going on: "... Fenice... Palace..."

The two men quickly gathered all their equipment. When they left, Indy pondered what to do next.

Then he heard a familiar splashing sound, just to his right: Giovanni's submarine had surfaced! A rather unusual event.

Indy took his torch out of his pocket and pointed it at the dripping vessel: behind the porthole, he saw Giovanni gesticulating wildly. He was opening and closing his arms, then opening them again.

With his lips, he was clearly trying to convey a word to Indy. "P"? No, "B" as in... Hello? Soon? Bravo?

Giovanni repeated his curious gesture, as if he were exploding with laughter—no, as if he were exploding.

An explosion! Giovanni was desperately trying to tell Indy that the diver had placed a bomb underwater.

Without hesitation—but especially without thinking this time—Indy rushed toward the bridge, dropped his torch on the ground, took off his woolen jacket, took a few deep breaths... and plunged into the icy water of the canal, right where he had seen the diver moments earlier.

Groping in the darkness, he tried to locate the bomb without success. Unable to hold his breath any longer, he surfaced to catch his breath. Then he dove again, with better success.

He found the object about two meters deep, managed to detach it without difficulty, and pulled it out of the water.

It was a time bomb. Indy had seen specialists handle such devices before but had never dealt with one himself! The key was not to shake it too much and, above all, to choose the right wire to defuse it...

After retrieving his woolen jacket to warm up and his torch to see better, Indy prepared to perform a feat.

With a decisive hand, he pulled out a red wire, and the clockwork mechanism stopped abruptly. “Pppppffffirooooo! As Herman would have said,” he thought with pride.

It was then that he fully realized the enormous risk he had just taken. This sudden realization, combined with the lack of oxygen, had a rather fatal consequence: Indy lost consciousness and collapsed onto the cobblestones.

Chapter 13

Open Faced

After mooring his submarine a few cables away, Giovanni jumped onto the dock and ran toward the bridge. Indy was still lying on the ground, looking more like a pile of wet rags than a person. “Indy! Indy!” called Giovanni, shaking his friend like he was trying to wake a newborn foal.

But Indy showed no signs of life.

Panic-stricken, Giovanni leapt to his feet and shouted to the four winds “Help! Someone! Help! Call a doctor!”

Suddenly, the sprawled body was shaken by a tremor, and a hand grabbed his ankle. Giovanni mouth filled with vomit as his body was gripped in terror. This story had just become real to him.

“But what the...? he burped, spattering Indy’s already wet shirt with some flecks of his lunch.

“Stop yelling like that,” commanded Indy weakly. “Do you want to alert the whole town? Look what you did to my shirt!”

“Indy! You’re alive?” Giovanni uttered out of a mouthful of drool.

“Of course I’m alive! What a question!” Imitating his father’s voice, Indy added with a wink:

“One thing’s for sure: your sense of humor hasn’t improved! I don’t find it funny! Not at all!” Completely bewildered, Giovanni leaned toward the young boy and forced himself to smile. But he was still only half reassured.

“Do you feel okay?” he asked worriedly.

“Like a fish in water...” replied Indy.

When he had fully regained his senses, the young boy stood up and decided that action needed to be taken immediately.

“Quick! To the Fenice! They must have placed a bomb there too.”

“The opera? Are you sure?”

“From what I overheard of their conversation, I have little doubt.”

“My God!” murmured Giovanni. “My father, Giuletta, Norma, and the professor: they’re there right now. It’s horrible!”

Indy looked up at the sky.

“Instead of lamenting, we’d better hurry, Giovanni, I beg you!”

Giovanni now regretted with all his heart having embarked on this treasure hunt. Because of this madness, the two people he loved most in the world might perish in an explosion. An explosion for which he would bear some responsibility.

“Che più t’aarrreesssiltivi!” sang Norma Bellini to the captivated crowd.

That evening, she judged her audience “attentive.”

She sensed in this crowd, even more well-behaved than usual, some bel canto specialists, on the lookout for the slightest vocal flaw in the artist.

Some even followed the score measure by measure, nodding their heads each time the singer masterfully interpreted a difficult passage.

What Norma didn’t know - nor did the orchestra in the pit or the audience in the hall - was

that a homemade bomb had been placed under the stage.

The clockwork mechanism had been set with jeweler's precision: the device would explode during the "Calabrian nightingale's" performance of Casta diva.

The masked Italian, dressed in his white cape, had hidden in a dark corner of the entrance hall. This position was well planned to ensure he did not miss one minute of the show.

Every two minutes, he checked his watch, his heart pounding.

The destruction of the Fenice would make headlines worldwide. Overnight, his cause would become famous, and he would go down in history. But a grain of sand threatened to disrupt this well-oiled machine. Indeed, Indiana Jones and Giovanni Casanova had just entered, breathless, into the temple of music lovers.

At first, the masked man clenched his fists. How to get rid of these troublemakers once and for all?

Suddenly, a Machiavellian smile formed under his mask. These two nuisances wanted to attend Norma Bellini's final show? Well, why not?

It was the perfect opportunity to see them disappear forever.

But this magnificent plan fell apart due to an unforeseen element: the Italian's repeated dives into the depths of the canal in the middle of January had taken a toll on his physical resistance.

That evening, he had stayed wet for a good twenty minutes before drying off and changing. The result of this imprudence did not take long: just as Indy and Giovanni passed by, he was seized by a sneezing fit.

The two young men turned around and easily recognized him. Bent in two, shaken by uncontrollable hiccups, the man with the Venetian mask was an easy prey, so Indy and Giovanni quickly captured him.

“Bless you, Mr. Unknown,” Indy quipped. “Unfortunately, your wishes won’t be granted. Indeed, I have two bad news for you: first, the Rialto bomb is defused. Second, you are going to tell us where you hid the one meant to blow up the Fenice.” “You mean the one that will blow up the Fenice,” corrected the terrorist. “You don’t really think I’ll reveal its location just because you ask me to. How naive! Atchaaa...!”

Indy and Giovanni exchanged a knowing look.

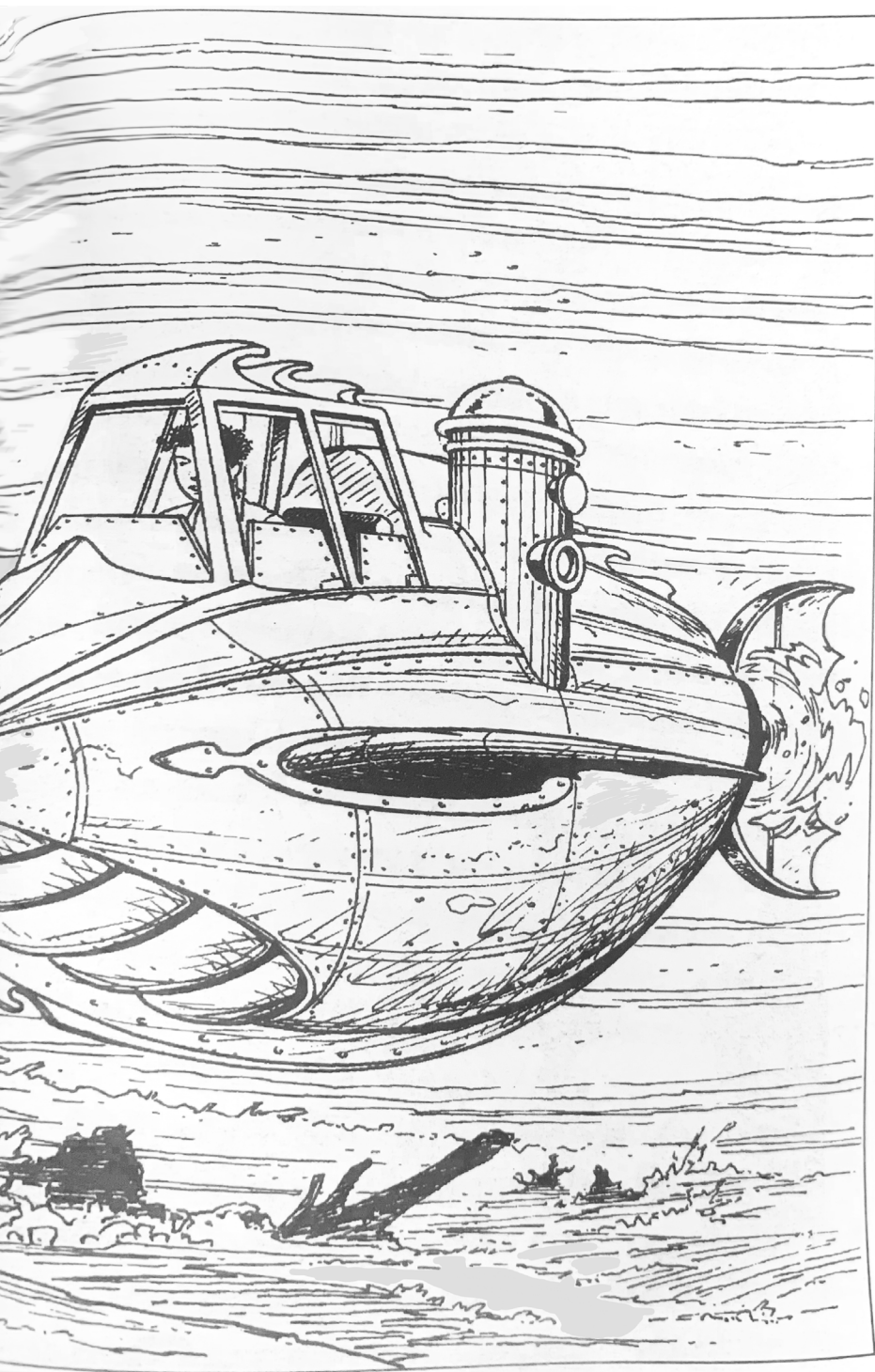
“As you wish,” replied Indy undeterred. While Giovanni firmly held their prisoner, Indy stood in front of him and, with a sharp tug, ripped off his mask.

The man let out a piercing scream.

“By all the saints in Heaven!” exclaimed Indy, discovering the face long hidden from others’ view. “What happened to you?”

The man was completely disfigured, covered in scars, his flesh seeming to have been torn by some enraged beast. Deeply embedded in their sockets,





his small, bloodshot eyes were injected with veins. His expression showed fierce hatred but also infinite distress.

“It’s not pretty, is it, my boy? You want to know what happened to me? Oh, it’s not hard to guess: the same thing that happened to my friend Federico. Only I was luckier than him...”

Shocked, Indy looked away.

The man took the opportunity to land a heel strike on Giovanni’s shin, making him let go. Instantly, Indy extended his leg and tripped his archenemy.

The latter fell face down.

In a flash, Indy positioned himself on his back to prevent him from getting up.

“Not so fast, Mr. Phantom of the Opera.

You forget an important detail. The bomb, where did you hide it?”

As the other maintained a stubborn silence, Indy resorted to stronger arguments.

“I warn you that I, too, have ways to make you talk. So if I were you, I’d confess right away.”

Putting words into action, he tightened the prisoner’s neck between his powerful hands and pulled back with all his strength. The latter didn’t resist long. On the verge of suffocation, he let out a rasp of defeat:

“Alright... phew! I’ll... I’ll talk...

Ouch!... Atchhhioouuuu!”

“We’re listening,” said Indy authoritatively.

“For the last time: where is the bomb?”

“Under the stage,” the stranger confessed in a

breath.

This revelation made Indy shudder.

Under the stage! So exactly under the feet of his dear Norma?

"I hope for your sake you're telling the truth," said Indy, trying to keep his cool.

"And to make sure, you'll lead us there and defuse it for us."

"Rather die!" retorted the Italian. "You don't know who I am, my boy. You don't know how many people have placed all their hopes in me. My life has no value compared to the cause."

And with these words, he was once again shaken by sneezes.

Chap 14

On the Razor's Edge

“The cause?” Indy exclaimed. “What cause? Your murderous madness?”

After sneezing and making one last effort, the man struggled like a trapped wild animal. He fought so fiercely that Giovanni had to come to the rescue, as Indy was in danger of being thrown several meters away.

“Calm down! There are two of us against one,” Indy pointed out. “So, you don’t stand a chance.”

“You don’t know what you’re talking about, you piece of society’s scum!” barked the Italian. “I am Mario Caprini, the leader of a group of revolutionaries.”

“Oh yeah? And I’m the leader of a group of scouts in Utah. Guess what? We have a blast on Sundays! And sometimes, guess what? We make bombs!!”

As insensitive to Indy’s humor as Professor Jones, the Italian was again agitated with rageful convulsions.

“We have been given a sacred mission,” he continued: “to destroy the very foundations of Italian culture and civilization, to rebuild our country on healthier bases. Atchool!”

Completely unimpressed by this speech, Indy continued:

“Let’s get back to the matter at hand: the bomb, Mr. Revolutionary. The bomb! It will have to

be defused. Otherwise, we're all going to blow up!" But the other didn't want to hear anything. He stood his ground and got drunk on his own words.

"These 'architectural marvels' that we are endlessly told about and that attract tourists from all over the world are nothing but a facade. A mask of respectability, an illusion. Behind these so-called masterpieces hides a civilization in full decadence that I abhor."

"Good grief!" replied Indy, stunned. "And you figured that out all by yourself?"

Once again, he pretended to strangle his prisoner.

"Sorry to interrupt, but you have a more urgent mission, I remind you..."

"Never! Never!" Caprini insisted.

"In that case, I have only one solution left."

"You're not going to...?" Giovanni asked, pale as a sheet.

"Oh, I'm not shying away from any emotion," Indy assured. "Moreover, I assume that this bomb is similar to the one I just defused. So..."

Giovanni couldn't believe his ears. Norma was right: this young American had guts!

"However, I can't take the risk of letting our friend escape. It's fortunate that when I was young, I took a few boxing lessons, and my instructor taught me how to knock out an opponent without pain. If I remember correctly, it should be done... like this."

He then placed his hand vertically over the neck of the unmasked Italian and struck a solid blow to the base of his neck. The man collapsed completely.



“And now, Giovanni, as the saying goes: there’s not a second to lose!”

One of the guards at La Fenice tried to prevent Indy from entering the backstage. But when the word “bomb” was mentioned, the guard’s attitude changed completely.

On stage, Norma had just started the first notes of *La Cenerentola*.

“No più mestaaaaa accanto al fuoooooo-cO000...”

That’s when he saw it. A bomb twice as big as the one at Rialto, set to explode... in five minutes!

Indy felt chills run down his spine. Indeed, he had just realized that the mechanism was different from the one he had handled a few moments earlier. More complex too.

Would Indy be able to defuse this one?

Nothing was less certain.

There was only one solution left.

The young boy rushed out of the backstage and hurried towards the stairs leading to the stage. The next moment, he was under the spotlight. Rightly so, his entrance had the effect of a bombshell.

“Ladies and gentlemen, no panic! But I must inform you that an explosive device has been placed under the stage! It should explode in four minutes!” Stunned, Norma stopped in the middle of a phrase and stared in amazement at the young boy who had just burst in.

“Indy! Are you sure of what you’re saying?” The audience had no intention of waiting for Indy’s confirmation. Already, piercing screams erupted

from all sides. The ladies, clinging to their husbands' arms, were pushing them unceremoniously towards the exit. In a matter of seconds, a gigantic chaos had formed. The "attentive" audience of music lovers had turned into a panicked herd. None of the basic rules of courtesy were being followed. People were insulting, jostling, and trampling each other shamelessly.

"I now understand what Caprini meant when he talked about a civilization in full decadence!" Indy thought as he watched the sad spectacle.

"Let's not stay here!" commanded Norma, herself stunned by the turmoil.

"You're right. Exit through the back door, I'll meet you outside. I have to go save this architectural marvel!"

"No, Indy, I forbid you! It's too dangerous!" Admittedly, the game might not be worth the candle. But the young boy decided to take his chance anyway.

"Listen, Norma, there are still three minutes before the explosion. I promise that if I haven't defused the bomb thirty seconds before the fatal moment, I'll leave immediately."

And without waiting for Norma's refusal, he rushed towards the backstage.

"Indy, come back, I beg you!" Norma shouted.

But in vain.

In front of the destructive device designed by Mario Caprini, Indy first tried to calm himself. He took deep, but calm breaths, in a regular rhythm.

The commotion caused by the evacuation of the opera was indeed disturbing his concentration. Once he felt perfectly in control, he examined the device more closely. After a moment of reflection, he concluded that only a green wire and a red wire deserved his attention.

The question was which one to cut. Logically, Indy would naturally have opted for the red one. But he did not rule out a trick on Caprini's part. The man was clever, and he must have considered the possibility of the bomb being discovered by a stagehand or... by the police if they had been warned in time.

It was therefore quite possible that he had reversed the usual colors to trap amateur bomb defusers! A cruelty trick fitting the character.

Indy was at this point in his reflections when he noticed that the countdown was dangerously approaching the last thirty seconds.

Forty... thirty-five... thirty-four... thirty-three... The red wire? The green wire?

Indy then remembered that Mario Caprini had proven in the past that he was not that knowledgeable about explosives.

Hadn't a bomb of his making horrifically mutilated him? The young boy concluded that the terrorist must now prioritize caution and therefore take all safety measures.

Without further hesitation, Indy placed his father's penknife under the red wire and cut it.

The clockwork mechanism stopped abruptly. Indy sighed with relief.

But this time, he did not faint. Indeed, an anxious thought had just occurred to him.

What if Mario Caprini had placed bombs... elsewhere than in La Fenice?

Chap 15

Carnival

In the entrance hall, only Giuletta, Professor Jones, Pietro Casanova, Giovanni, and Norma, who had joined them, remained.

“Wonderful, this idea of a public ball!” exclaimed Henry Jones. “They’re right: we’re all far too stiff these days. Nothing like a street dance to celebrate the national holiday. All social classes mixed together, that’s the future!”

“Dear professor,” Pietro Casanova replied very seriously, “that’s the very essence of carnival. For a few wild days, masters mingle with servants, the rich with the poor, and everyone is on equal footing thanks to the festivities.”

Still lying on the ground, Mario Caprini was slowly regaining his senses. Wrapped in his white cloak, his face livid, he really looked like... a ghost of himself.

Outside, the Sunday-dressed crowd exchanged sharp remarks.

“That young troublemaker should be arrested immediately!” protested an old man waving a handkerchief. “Today’s youth respects nothing! And the government lets it happen!”

“One wonders where we’re headed!” chimed in a second man, sporting a monocle.

“No wonder the world is at war!” concluded another spectator wisely. “It was bound to happen!”

Indy didn’t care about these perfidies. He had acquired the firm conviction that his prisoner had

placed bombs elsewhere in Venice, and he was determined to make him talk, no matter the cost!

“Come on, wake up, Mr. Revolutionary!” he ordered without further ado. “I won’t be gentle with you, unlike your friend Pier Paolo. If you don’t talk, you can say your last prayers... If Indy allows you to, you miserable cockroach!” intervened Norma, beside herself.

A sinister smile then appeared on Mario Caprini’s monstrous face.

“What a shame I didn’t get my hands on your ancestor’s treasure!” he sneered at Giovanni. “I would have put it to good use. Heh! Heh! I could have placed even more bombs in Venice, Rome, Naples!”

“But how did you know I was on the trail of that treasure?” Giovanni wondered. “I didn’t tell anyone.”

“To no one except the librarian who got the manuscript for you... But it turns out that man is part of the movement I lead. He told me everything... After that, I just had to follow you discreetly... I knew your every move. I even planned to steal your submarine...”

And the man began to recount all the details of his plan.

“What an inexhaustible talker!” thought Indy to himself. That’s when he understood Caprini’s maneuver. By overwhelming his audience with words, he was just trying to buy time! How had he fallen into such an obvious trap?

“That’s enough!” he interrupted, before turn-

ing to Giuletta. "Did you bring what I asked for?"

The young girl nodded silently and took her father's revolver out of her handbag. "It's loaded," she said.

"My God!" exclaimed Pietro Casanova. "You're not going to use that weapon, my little girl. It's too dangerous!"

Indy had no such scruples. He grabbed the revolver Giuletta handed him and pressed it against Caprini's temple. Outside, the crowd's reactions were immediate.

"By the Madonna, that young man is a mad-man!"

"A lunatic!"

"A dangerous maniac!"

"But where is the police?"

The police, indeed, had finally arrived on the scene with drums and trumpets.

"Make way! Come on, disperse! We'll handle this!"

And the small detachment entered the Fenice hall, led by Corporal Barami, his mustaches fluttering.

"You again!" he exclaimed upon seeing Professor Jones and Norma. Then he spotted Indy, still holding the revolver against Caprini's temple.

"Now, calm down, my young friend. You're going to put down your weapon and..."

"This man is a terrorist," Indy explained. "He placed a bomb under the stage. I defused it, but he may have planted more all over Venice..."

Corporal Barami and his men exchanged

knowing glances.

“Of course, of course... We are very grateful for your cooperation, dear Mr....?”

“Jones, Indiana Jones.”

“Very well. And now, Mr. Jones, we’ll take over, if you don’t mind.”

Gradually, the police, arranged in a circle around him, moved closer to Indy.

“No, you don’t understand! I’m not crazy! Go see under the stage if you don’t believe me!”

“I attest that Junior is not crazy,” Professor Jones intervened. “He is accompanying me on this wonderful evening of July 4th, for the national holiday celebrations.”

“Pssstt!” Pietro Casanova whispered.

“Huh, what? How?” the professor stammered.

Pietro leaned toward him and whispered in his ear, “You are mistaken, dear professor. It’s not the national holiday, but the carnival!”

Unconvinced, Henry Jones shook his head vehemently.

Exasperated, Indy decided he would handle this matter alone. He forced Caprini to stand and pushed him toward the exit.

“Gentlemen, once you recognize your mistake, you will thank me,” announced the young man. “Until then, I demand you commandeer a gondola and take us straight... where exactly, Mr. Revolutionary?”

And he cocked the revolver to finally convince Caprini to speak.

“... To the D... Doge’s Palace,” he admitted,

trembling with fear.

“There aren’t any others elsewhere?” insisted Indy.

“N... no... n... no, I swear!”

“And when are they set to explode?”

“At the t... twelfth s... stroke of midnight.”

Indy turned to the police.

“Gentlemen, you heard him? So, what are you waiting for to take action? It’s a quarter to midnight. That doesn’t leave us much time.”

“Not a second to lose!” Giovanni added.

The minutes that followed were among the longest Indy had ever experienced.

Accompanied by two policemen who, having no other choice, had decided to trust the young “madman,” he prayed to Heaven that the hastily summoned gondolier would achieve a miracle.

They had only five minutes left to reach the Doge’s Palace and defuse the bombs planted there by Caprini.

“How many are there in total?” Indy asked, on pins and needles.

“Three, there are three,” the terrorist replied.

“Three!” Indy exclaimed. “Well, one thing is certain: this time, I’m sitting it out. I refuse to defuse them. You’ll have to do it alone, Mr. Revolutionary. And you won’t have any choice but to succeed, or you won’t come out of the palace alive, I promise you!”

Chattering his teeth, shaken by sneezes, Mario

Caprini cursed endlessly.

“Faster, faster!” Indy urged.

“Faster! Faster! Bah! Cursed be the Americans,” grumbled the gondolier into his beard.

“We only have three minutes left,” Corporal Barami noted.

“We’ll never make it!” Indy fretted. “Faster! Faster!”

The gondolier sweated and puffed, but his boat seemed stuck on the water’s surface... Pure illusion, for it soon reached the immediate vicinity of the Doge’s Palace.

There was only a minute and a half left for Mario Caprini to defuse his death devices.

“I’ll accompany you to the entrance door,” Indy announced, “and then it’s up to you! But you’ll go it alone!”

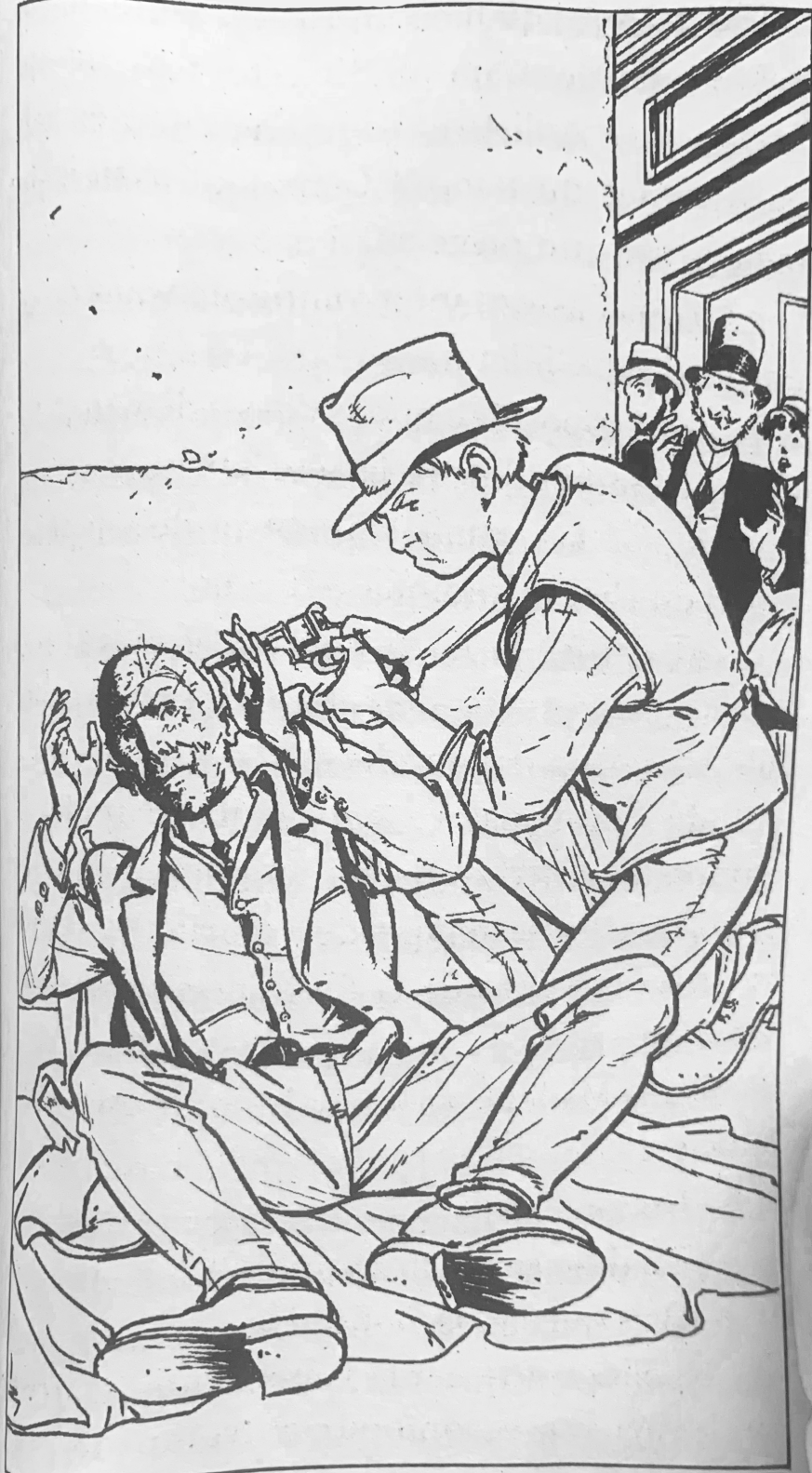
With trembling legs, the “revolutionary” rushed into the famous building that dominated St. Mark’s Square at the precise moment when the basilica’s bell tower began to chime the twelve strokes of midnight.

Indy closed the heavy door behind him, not without wishing him good luck.

“He won’t make it,” Corporal Barami predicted.

“Oh, yes, he will!” Indy replied. “That man may spend the rest of his life in prison, but he’ll always hold on to the hope of being freed. And if that ever happens, rest assured he’ll resume his criminal activities. You see, he’s on a sacred mission.”

The countdown was about to reach its end.



The tenth stroke of midnight sounded... then the eleventh... and finally the twelfth...

In a silence... of life, the following day began in the utmost calm.

Epilogue

“I must insist, Professor Jones,” protested Pietro Casanova vehemently.

The two of them were seated in front of a chessboard, locked in an intense game. However, they faced a significant problem. Neither of them remembered the rules.

“Knights move diagonally,” claimed Pietro.

“Not at all: they move horizontally and vertically, up to two squares at a time!” Professor Jones countered.

For half an hour, they hurled accusations at each other until the game took an even more violent turn. The two men got so heated and gesticulated so much that they toppled over, crashing to the floor headfirst.

The impact had an unexpected effect.

“What am I doing on the floor, legs in the air?” wondered Professor Jones. “I was just drinking a glass of port, and suddenly..”

“Me too!” confirmed Pietro. “We were discussing the treasure that Giovanni has set his mind on finding—the treasure of our ancestor, Giacomo Casanova.”

Giuletta was about to explain the crux of the matter when Pietro Casanova struck his forehead with his right hand.

“Good heavens, I’ve got it now! I know where to find the treasure!”

This revelation captured the undivided attention of his audience.

“When I was a child, I played in the garden of a house that belonged to my grandmother. She often told me that Giacomo had spent happy days there. He particularly appreciated a painting by Canaletto depicting Venice and the Grand Canal. Our family has kept that painting with great care. It’s in our living room, right here. And I believe the treasure’s location must be shown in it.”

Ignoring the skeptical looks his words had elicited, he went to a drawer, pulled out a magnifying glass, and walked to the living room. He stopped in front of the Canaletto painting.

Invisible to the naked eye, he discovered a small cross drawn at the base of the Rialto Bridge, but about a meter or two back, towards the lagoon.

“There’s your treasure, Giovanni! You were right! To think I doubted you!”

Everyone, with Giovanni leading, applauded this deduction worthy of a true chess champion!

“Checkmate!” admitted Professor Jones.

He gave a knowing wink to his son.

“But I believe we still owe a great deal to... Junior!”

“I agree,” said Norma. “And to forever mark this day in our memory, I suggest that Indy and I meet every January at Café Florian. If you have no objection, Professor Jones,” she added mischievously.

She then gave a long look at her best friend. A look that wouldn’t accept any contradiction.

“Will you be there, Indy?”

“Only time will tell,” replied the young man. “But if it’s up to me... you can count on it!”

Translator's Notes:

At the time of this writing the one print copy of this book available on Amazon is priced at over \$700. I would like to dedicate this translation to that seller.

This is the fourth *Indiana Jones Jr* book I have translated, unfortunately getting copies of these books is a challenge onto itself. I translated them in the order I got them.

I re-titled *Indiana Jones at L'Ampoule Radioactive* and changed a mistake about the dog-namesake being dead. The dog is alive in the next French book.

In *The Sacred Meteorite* I made minor changes to a few words to flip the meaning of scenes. The original French version has a misguided application of common tropes from the series.

The only change to this book deals with *Indiana Jones Jr. et Le Metropolitan Violin*. Indiana Jones tangles with Al Capone in that story. Problem is in the Young Indiana Jones TV show they meet again seven years later and apparently do not know each other. In that book Al Capone is only 14 or 15 and gives out his full name during crimes. He is not a “famous gangster” at that point as later French books describe him, and criminals do not normally give out their first and last names during crimes. In my translation Indy and Capone never hear each other's names. That is the only change in this book, the references to Capone by name are removed.

B I B L I O T H È Q U E V E R T E

INDIANA JONES™ Jr

ET LE SPECTRE DE VENISE

Jérôme Jacobs
Illustration : Érik Juszezak



Venice in Peril!

Mechanical mysteries below the water and a masked madman with ambitions for world domination!

Indy races against time to stop a deadly plot, can he outwit a madman before Venice crumbles beneath the chaos? Every second counts in this pulse-pounding adventure where one wrong move could spell disaster for the entire world!

In English for the first time!
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